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AMERICAN NOBILITY

From the French of
PIERRE DE COULEVAIN

BY
Alys Hallard

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INTRODUCTION

America is no longer the New World, but the Modern World. It is a world which ought to awaken our interest and our fellow-feeling, for, whilst owing its origin to us, it has grown and developed outside the routine that we abhor and in the midst of the liberty of which we dream.

We fondly imagine that America, as a republic, must be the ideal nation of equality. This is quite a mistake, for nowhere are the lines of demarcation so distinct and nowhere are they so jealously maintained.

Towards the seventeenth century, America was open to all the oppressed and the discontented and to all the adventurously inclined of the Old World. Dutchmen came and settled there in order to escape from the Spanish yoke. English Puritans, persecuted by the Stuarts, came, and sectarians, too, from everywhere, in the wake of William Penn, the Quaker. These emigrants, whom political or religious causes had forced to leave their country, did not mix with the adventurers who had invaded America. Their religious faith and their principles were as a holy ark, keeping them above the rising flood of immigration. They formed a caste apart, and this caste constituted "society." For a very long time, this caste was quite inaccessible to *parvenus*. Some thirty or forty years ago, the plutocracy which could boast of three degrees of descent, and of enormous wealth, forced its way into this sacred circle. It grouped itself around the

"Patriarchs," made use of their prestige, snrrounded them and overwhelmed them, so that at present these "Patriarchs" are nothing more than the nucleus of "society," a nucleus already swallowed up, as an American has said.

It is a fact that the families who are descended from the real founders of the United States, who have genealogical trees, coats-of-arms and proofs of long existence, have given way to the millionaires. The narrow Puritanism and conservative spirit common to these old families placed them in a position of inferiority in the struggle for power and money. They are now experiencing that effacement which seems to be the lot of the aristocracy everywhere.

What is called "society" in America is by no means an idle class. Like the upper *bourgeoisie* in France, it is composed of lawyers, doctors, financiers, and manufacturers. It forms a kind of Faubourg St. Germain which is more difficult of access and more exclusive than this class of society in Europe at present.

To be or not to be a member of "society" is of more interest to an American than the "to be or not to be" of Hamlet, for the American is the most materialistic person in the world. He does not trouble about doing well, but about "doing quickly." He works, builds, and constructs for himself, and not for his children. As soon as he has won in the struggle for money, he throws himself into the struggle for position.

In order to get admission among the *élite* of his country, the new millionaire gives extraordinary entertainments, spends huge sums of money in presents, and employs stratagems which would supply comedy with some very amusing scenes.

The growth of new strata around "society," at present, is something formidable, for, in America, emulation is terrific. It is the motive power which Providence uses for starting that activity which both amazes and alarms us. The child wants more toys than its play-fellows, the woman more luxury than her friends, and the man more dollars than his colleagues. To have more! Under the influence of this stimulus, which urges each one on, the New World is going ahead, but the question is—whither? According to Ecclesiastes: "The thing that hath been, it is that which still shall be,"—and if so America will have the same ordeals that we have had, although they will probably take less time, and afterwards it will overtake us in our evolution. When it is covered with cities and when it has plenty of money and men, some Napoleon will lead it on to the conquest of Brazil and Mexico and unite all the continent under his sceptre. It will have military glory, honours, and distinctions and all the other baubles that we possess. After this backward movement, which appears to be necessary, it will shake off the yoke and rush on, purified and improved by the ordeal through which it has passed, to the conquest of life by means of science, self-sacrifice, and love.

In the United States, the work of man is more remarkable than the man himself. The woman is interesting though, in herself, as she is the product of ideas, habits, customs, and principles quite different from ours.

The political, as well as the ordinary, immigrants found the struggle harsh and painful, and in this struggle they were most efficaciously helped by their women. While the men were conquering territories,

digging the soil and building towns, the women were making the home.

Freed from the conventions which had crushed her, the timid wife developed into a valiant, and often heroic, companion. Outcast women purified themselves by work and devotion and, in the new society, woman created for herself a wider and nobler sphere.

Man neither grudged her liberty nor honours. He had the greatest respect and admiration for her, together with a chivalrous sentiment which has been perpetuated, as the mothers inculcated it into their sons. At present, this is one of the finest traits in the American character.

Individually, women have very little influence in the United States, but collectively they are formidable. They are quite aware of this, for they hold together in the most extraordinary way, and they certainly contribute largely to the progress of their country. Their work is done by means of sudden freaks and infatuations. Fashion rules everything. At one minute it is the fashion to be interested in some particular branch of science, and for the time being no one cares for anything else. All at once, some particular poet or prose writer is in vogue. A few years ago, Browning was the man of the day, and after that, Balzac, whose books were in every one's hands. Sometimes a special kind of misfortune stirs every one's pity; it may perhaps be blindness. Bazaars are organised, money comes pouring in, and blind asylums are built. All this is the most extraordinary example of suggestion that can be imagined.

No people are more awake to the fact of the shortness of life than Americans. It is this consciousness that spurs them on, although they are not really aware

of the fact themselves. It urges men on to work and women on to pleasure and makes them selfish. Life is short, they say, so let us have a good time. Life is short, so there must be no useless sentimentality nor any useless acquaintances. Everything must serve for something, it must help onward.

It is not among the society women that we must look for the greatest virtues and good qualities. In America, there is a very large class of serious, educated women and it is these women who form the bulwarks of America, just as the provincial and middle-class women of France form the bulwarks of the country.

Whether it be that the mixture of race, liberty, and rational education produces a distinct variety in the feminine genus, or that the American woman has not yet attained her full development, certain it is that her nature is simple, entirely objective, and that she has only the visual quality.

No other being in creation enjoys life more, or gets out of it more satisfaction and pleasure. Her judgment is neither troubled by excess of sentiment, nor by excess of sensuality. Her vision is very clear and exact.

No brain contains more impressions, images, and memories than that of the American woman. The thousands of American wives and daughters who come to Europe every year fulfil an unconscious mission, as indeed do all creatures. A higher Will urges them to our continent. They are seized with what they call "the European fever," which is a nervous disquietude, a need of change, something similar to the feeling experienced by birds at the time of their migration. And so these women set out, some to take lessons,

others to rest from their household duties, or to buy dress. They see masterpieces of art, different countries, and beautiful things of all kinds. They take back with them objects of art, together with relics of the past. Their rôle is the same as that of the bee and the butterfly. They are sent to fetch a little of the soul of the Old World, a little of its fertilising pollen. They have to take back some of the elements of which Nature has need for producing the artists, the poets, and the thinkers who will be the glory of America, just as the workers of to-day are its power and its force.

PART I

AMERICAN NOBILITY

CHAPTER I

EVERYTHING in the house of Mrs. Villars, Washington Square, New York, pointed to an approaching departure for Europe and to a long absence. In the hall a pile of luggage was to be seen, labelled "Paris." There were comfortable deck-chairs and those flat cabin trunks which an American woman packs and unpacks with equal pleasure.

The pictures and mirrors were all protected, the carpets rolled up, and the chintz summer covers had been drawn over the furniture. On the walls and on the brackets there were ugly gaps, and throughout the house, was the cold, empty look of uninhabited places.

The library was the only room which still had a gay, comfortable appearance. Notwithstanding its oak wainscoting, its bronze-tinted walls, its Queen Anne chimney-piece, mediæval lantern, painted windows, and well-lined book-shelves, the room had not a sober look. There was evidence of feminine caprice in the crowd of pretty, modern, artistic objects which were not quite in accordance with the general style of the room. Turkey carpets, bear and tiger skins were strewn about the floor. There were chairs of all sizes

and shapes, adorned with silk coverings or with balsam cushions. There were small sofas with screens at the back and glass-cases filled with objects of art, lamps with wonderful shades, and a profusion of flowers.

A girl, whose face and dress were in perfect harmony with this extremely modern interior, was moving about in the room, putting the illustrated papers and reviews into the drawers of the long table which stood in the middle of the library.

While her back was turned towards the door, a visitor appeared beneath the raised curtains. He was about thirty years of age and his irreproachable evening dress showed off to advantage his tall figure. His clearly cut features were those of a Saxon type and he had the unmistakable air of a man of good lineage. He hesitated for a few seconds and then advanced quietly.

Annie Villars did not see him until he was at her side.

"Frank!" she exclaimed, with a slight start, "how you frightened me! I was so busy with my straightening that I never saw you come in."

"Can I help you?"

"No, thanks, I have just finished," she replied, closing the last drawer. "I shall be thankful to rest a minute."

She led the way to the fireplace and, pointing to a chair for her visitor, sat down herself in a rocking-chair, which she set in movement with a push of her crossed feet.

"Rock away," said Frank Barnett, smiling. "That is a pleasure you will not have in Europe."

"Do you mean to say that there are no rocking-chairs there?" she asked.

"There are some, but they are uncomfortable, heavy, and difficult to move. They do not know how to make them, over there, and it is only in America that we know how to use them."

"They are delightful inventions."

"Yes, and I am sure we owe our best inspirations to them. The rocking movement either lulls or stimulates our ideas. It is a sort of accompaniment to conversation and when two people, who are talking or flirting, rock together, I would wager that they are both of the same mind."

Miss Villars looked at the young man in surprise.

"I did not think you capable of so much penetration," she said.

"Thank you," replied Mr. Barnett, bowing. "It seems to me," he continued calmly, "that the rocking-chair is an admirable help to coquetry for a woman. It shows off to advantage her figure and her hands and feet, and then, too, it soothes her nerves. An American shows what state of mind she is in by the way she rocks herself, just as a Spanish woman does by the movement of her fan. When the movement is moderate and regular, she is in a peaceful frame of mind, when it is long and slow, it denotes reflection: a short, quick movement means anger and bad temper. Just at present, your way of rocking shows that you are very tired."

"I am not at all surprised to hear that," said Annie Villars, laughing, "for I am dead tired. I thought we should never come to the end of all we had to do."

"And so you are really just about to start on this famous trip to Europe, about which you have been thinking for so many years?"

"Yes, and now that the moment has really arrived

to leave New York, I feel so horribly sad. If I dared, I would unpack my trunks again."

"Dare!"

"Oh, it would be quite useless, for I should begin to pack once more within a couple of days. Really, though, I never thought it would be so difficult to say good-bye. All day long, stupid little tears have kept coming into my eyes, making my nose red. Is it not ridiculous?"

"Ridiculous? No, not at all. You surely ought to feel a little regret on leaving your friends and relatives."

"It is very curious, but, every day, while I have been busy putting away all my treasures, I have had the impression, all the time, that I should never see them again. I wonder whether it is a presentiment. I am going to be drowned on the way, perhaps, or die of fever at Rome, or of influenza somewhere else. I should not be the first——"

"There is something I dread for you much more than the voyage, fever, or influenza——"

"What is it you dread?"

"Heiress-traps, which Europeans set so cleverly. They are frequently made in the form of a coronet. Even the most sensible American looks at them, only out of curiosity at first, but gradually with envy. She goes up to them, gets very near—too near—and then —clack, she finds herself caught, and before she knows where she is, she is a duchess, a marchioness, or a countess, and the thing is done."

Miss Villars could not help laughing.

"Frank," she said, "you ought to write a Guide-book, for the use of girls going to Europe. You could point out to them, by means of allegories of this kind,

the dangers to which they will be exposed and so put them on their guard."

"Alas, it would be so much time wasted. Titles and great names exercise a fascination which I do not pretend to explain, but that fascination acts even on the best balanced of feminine minds."

"You can be quite easy about me, at any rate. I have a position in society which quite suffices, as far as my ambition and vanity are concerned. I am the last person in the world to be influenced by a title. You have known me so long, that you ought to be sure of that."

"A title would not influence you, no. But I am not so sure that a titled man would not. Madame de Keradieu will introduce you into the Faubourg St. Germain world and, with the best intentions possible, she will lead you right into the lions' den. It will be a miracle if you are not devoured. To be quite frank, I tremble to think of what will happen. Your immense fortune will excite the covetousness of unscrupulous men without any delicacy, men who are incapable of working, either with their brains or hands, and who want to marry money, and nothing but money. You will see them play the part of the disinterested lover, they will kiss your hand and pay you empty compliments. You will probably be fascinated by their eloquence and their distinguished manners. In a little time, you will begin to think American men prosaic, awkward, and humdrum. Between this stage and what I dread, there is only one step."

"If I were very young, you might be right in fearing for me, but I am twenty-one; I have passed the age of reason three times over, and I have been out three years."

"Yes, but the society you frequent is composed of people whose family and character you know. Your experience of human nature is, therefore, extremely limited."

"Oh, not as limited as you think. I have met with hypocrisy and falsehood enough to be able to recognise them," answered the girl drily.

"So much the worse and so much the better," returned Frank Barnett, calmly. "If your father expressed a wish in his will that you should not go to Europe before you were twenty-one, it was, no doubt, because he hoped that you would be married by then, or, at any rate, that you would be better able to defend yourself against the enterprises of fortune-hunters."

"You need not be uneasy, I will take care of myself," said the girl, with a look and accent which revealed her strong character. "No one will run away with me, or marry me without my consent, and it is my firm intention to come back again Annie Villars."

"Heaven grant that you may!"

These words were spoken with such warmth that a fleeting colour came into the girl's face.

"Oh, as for you, Frank," she said, laughing, by way of hiding her confusion, "you are one of the men who would neither let a woman nor a dollar go out of America, if you could help it."

"You are quite right. It makes me furious to see our girls taking to these idle dandies fortunes which have sometimes cost the life, and nearly always the health, of their fathers. If this is to continue, the day will come when we shall be obliged to make an incursion into Europe, for the sake of getting back our national wealth. Women are as ungrateful as children. They neither appreciate kindness nor devo-

tion. In America, we recognise all their rights and we have granted them every privilege. They live in a luxury unknown to Europe and they have the lion's share of everything. At present, even that is not enough. They must now have coronets and, as we cannot supply them with these, they prefer titled men, men who, even with their titles, are certainly not our equals."

Frank Barnett spoke in a tone of absolute conviction that left no doubt as to his sincerity.

"You talk like our society papers," remarked his companion. "I must say that I do not approve of their systematic attacks on the aristocracy of Europe. As soon as an unfortunate aristocrat puts his foot on our soil, they all attack him, insinuate that he has mercenary intentions, publish his story, and endeavour to make him appear ridiculous. Such fury is suggestive of envy."

"Envy? Oh, no, we are rich and powerful enough to make that impossible," answered the young man, with a note of pride in his tone. "We used to have the greatest respect for the old, historic names, but after seeing descendants of the Crusaders, men belonging to old Germanic tribes, and scions of princely families come and sell their names and parchments to the highest bidder, our disillusion is complete. We had implicit confidence formerly, but after that we had absolute distrust, and the consequence is that a whole class is now treated by us with the scorn that just a handful of spendthrift degenerates deserve. I myself was so prejudiced about the aristocracy that, when my sister Mary informed me she was going to marry an Austrian Count, I was furious, for I felt humiliated."

"Yes, I remember," said Annie, "and now you spend

weeks in her country-house and at the houses of her friends. You frequent the society of princes and dukes to such a degree that you will surely be accused of snobbishness yourself."

Frank Barnett coloured slightly.

"Snobbishness belongs to the *parvenu,* and at least I am not a *parvenu.* During the five years that I have mixed with what is called upper-class society in Europe, I have had time to study it. It is better than I thought it was. Its every-day life is less strained and goes more smoothly than ours, so that one has a real sense of rest. I must own that a man with the real qualities of the old nobility is a fine specimen of humanity. I told you, for instance, that I met the Duke of Orleans, this last autumn, in Bohemia, at Prince Varna's. We went out shooting together for about a week. He was simply delightful. Several times, when speaking of France, his eyes filled with tears, and this did not seem at all ridiculous. When I was leaving, he said to me: 'You are lucky to be able to go to Paris, I envy you.' There was such sincere grief in his voice when he said this, that I was quite touched by it. If, by giving a million dollars, I could have helped him to get the law repealed by which he is exiled, I would certainly have given them."

"A nice thing for a republican to do," remarked Annie.

"The men of the aristocracy are not worth much from an American point of view, as they lack the energy necessary for reaction. Their charm, though, cannot be denied. They give you the impression of extremely refined and highly developed individuals and when this is not carried too far, they are perfect."

"Like the Duke of Orleans, for instance?" suggested Annie, archly.

"Yes, like the Duke of Orleans," agreed Frank Barnett. "Unfortunately most of them are no longer at their best, they have deteriorated. There seems to be a sort of flaw or blemish in their character, or in their moral attitude, just as there are cracks in old china. I think they are all brave, though, and capable of heroic deeds."

"That is something."

"Not much. Heroism is rarely needed in modern life. Energy and straightforwardness are the two most necessary things. It would not be much consolation to you to know that your husband was brave and ready to die for his country, if he were unfaithful to you and made you unhappy."

"No, indeed."

"I should think it quite natural, and even intelligent, if the aristocracy wanted to rejuvenate by means of marriage with foreigners, but it is not that at all. Rich aristocrats marry women belonging to their own world. It is only those who are ruined or worse who come in search of the American woman. It certainly is not very flattering for her."

"Oh, as far as that is concerned, we have paid them back in their own coin. Most of the American girls who have married aristocrats are *parvenues*. Unable to get into society in our country, they have gone to Europe and bought titles."

"And when they have come back to us as princesses or duchesses, we have received them——"

"Why, of course, since the husband is supposed to ennoble the wife. I should have done the same thing in their place. Life is short, so that we must get the

most satisfaction and enjoyment we can out of it. Personally, I would not give up the position I hold in New York society merely to become a *parvenue* in any Faubourg St. Germain in the world. It would be simply stupid."

"It certainly would and, between ourselves, American women are not seen to advantage in the midst of an aristocratic gathering. I have been struck by this repeatedly, so that it must be as I say. Some of them are stiff and paralysed, as it were, by timidity, whilst others put on too much assurance and familiarity. Although they may be prettier and more elegant than most of the duchesses and marchionesses, they do not come up to them."

"And why not, pray?" asked Annie Villars, in a slightly vexed tone.

"Because European women put a certain art into all they do or say. In the middle class, this art is too evident and often appears affected. Among the *grandes dames,* though, it is not evident, for they are consummate actresses, but it has required long centuries to bring them to this state of perfection. Side by side with them, natural American women are unmistakably young, and they appear prosaic and even vulgar. They have the same effect as newly embroidered flowers on a foundation of old silk. There is something harsh that does not blend. And then, you see, European men do not appreciate such 'simple' women. They have seen too much of life for that. They like coloured lips, eyes that have been touched up, and scientific coquetry. I have seen behind the scenes in many of these European-American homes. In those where the husband and wife got on the best, it always seemed to me that they did not understand each other at all."

"And yet these foreign marriages generally appear to turn out well."

"Thanks to the wife's abnegation. An American woman will make sacrifices for her European husband such as she would *never* make for a man of her own country. This always makes me furious. We have produced a great nation, but we have not succeeded in bringing out the true qualities of our women. We have spoilt them and they now treat us as their slaves. They really and truly consider themselves as our superiors. When an American woman marries a European though, she becomes yielding and obedient, she is satisfied with anything, and accommodates herself without a murmur, to the tastes of her lord and master. You really would not recognise her. You may be quite sure, though, that the apprenticeship for all these American princesses, duchesses, and marchionesses has been a very hard one. They have not cared to own to all the mortifications they have endured. I now believe that Providence sends some of our girls to France and to Italy, so that they may learn their true rôle."

"I am very curious to see all these things and these people for myself," said Annie Villars. "You have told me your impressions and I will tell you mine. They will probably be quite different, and then how we shall argue!"

"You do not intend to stay more than a year?" asked the young man, with visible anxiety.

"Oh, no. We must be back for Clara's wedding."

"While you are away, I shall finish furnishing and arranging my house. Opening all the cases of curiosities I have brought back from the four quarters of the earth will entertain me. I have really forgotten what is inside them all."

"Shall I tell you what you might do?" said Annie, suddenly.

"Yes."

"George Ottis is to join us in Rome, in December. You might come with him."

"Do you really mean it?" asked Frank Barnett, his voice trembling slightly and his face lighting up with joy.

"Yes, I wish you would. Clara will monopolise George, of course, and mother and I would then be reduced to our own society—which would not be at all amusing," added Annie, with that somewhat brutal frankness which characterises the American woman.

The young man's face darkened. Annie Villars had been playing with him in this way for the last three years.

"Right," he answered, "I will come to Rome. And now I will say good-bye and wish you a pleasant journey."

"Shall you not be at the boat to-morrow?"

"No, I am going to Lenox early in the morning. I should not care to be lost in the crowd of your admirers. I preferred coming to say farewell in a less wholesale manner. You will have plenty of people without me to give you a good send-off. A good send-off, a bevy of friends, and plenty of flowers. Girls only care for that sort of thing nowadays. It is a triumph for them and shows their importance in society life."

"Why not say at once that we are the vainest creatures on earth?" remarked Annie, colouring with pique.

Frank Barnett, evidently not wishing to protest, rose with a smile.

"Forgive me teasing you this time, and, while you are about it, forgive all my past sins."

"Oh, I forgive you. You may depart in peace."

"And Annie, if I can be of any use to you, at any time, you have only to let me know. I am entirely at your service. You have neither father nor brother and we are such old friends."

Annie Villars seemed to be slightly troubled by these words. "I shall not forget," she answered, speaking more gently.

"And do not get transformed into a duchess or a marchioness," added Frank, "for we cannot do without you."

"There is no fear of that. I shall come back to the land of rocking-chairs. I shall come back," she repeated, with the imperturbable assurance of the human being who believes in free-will. "Have you seen mother and Clara?" she asked, rising in her turn.

"Yes, I have said good-bye to them."

"Well, then, farewell till we meet in Rome, in December."

"Good-bye."

The two looked straight into each other's eyes for a second and then shook hands quickly, but heartily. Frank Barnett then turned towards the door and walked very slowly away. When once she was alone, it was as though a vague intuition told Annie that love and happiness were within reach, for she made a movement forwards and her lips moved, as though she were about to call the young man back. She stood still again and remained mute until the closing of the hall-door told her that Frank Barnett had left the house. She sat down and the little tears she had qualified as "stupid" came once more into her eyes.

A tall, fair-haired girl, wearing a most becoming dress, rushed into the room, like a whirlwind, and planted herself straight in front of Annie.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well! What?"

"Has Frank proposed? Are you engaged?"

"Engaged? Are you mad?"

"Good heavens, has he gone away without saying anything?"

As though overwhelmed with disappointment, Clara May sank down on the carpet, at her cousin's feet.

"I was hoping that, at the last moment, the fear of losing you would untie his tongue. It really is too stupid, for it is so evident that he is in love with you. A blind man would guess it, by the very sound of his voice when he speaks to you. With all his fine feeling, in keeping silence out of delicacy, he is running the risk of losing you, for all the poverty-stricken aristocrats we shall meet will not have such scruples and will not be so discreet."

Annie Villars stopped her rocking-chair abruptly.

"Oh, do be quiet," she exclaimed. "I have been warned and put on my guard quite sufficiently, thank you. It is as though you had all agreed together to spoil the pleasure of my trip for me." She then started rocking herself again, in a way that betrayed her annoyance.

"You have been to Europe and come back again," she continued, after a slight pause.

"Yes, but we have not the same character at all. You are much more impressionable——"

"You might as well say, at once, that I am sentimental and romantic."

"Oh, no, thank heaven, you are not as bad as that.

Still I think you could more easily be persuaded into anything than I should be. And then, too, you have an independent fortune, and a fortune big enough to tempt a Royal Highness. The newspapers will not fail to announce the arrival in Paris of the wealthy Miss Villars of New York. Think of the effect that will produce. I simply tremble to think of the result."

"Make your mind easy. I shall never marry a foreigner, and much less a poor foreigner. It is not that I should grudge my money, but I should be afraid of being married for my money. You need not worry, for the man is not yet born who could make me give up America for him."

"Well, I only hope he is not, but I shall keep my eyes open. Only imagine what our poor aunts would say if you, a Villars, the daughter of their brother, Philip, should marry a Frenchman or an Italian—and a Catholic. They would make themselves ill over it and they would never forgive you. The reason they insisted on my going with you is that they have no faith in your mother seeing through the wiles that will beset you. I might add that I am giving a good proof of my devotion to you, as I certainly would not leave George just now for any one else."

"Yes, but you might as well own that you are not sorry to go to Paris to get your trousseau."

"Quite true, but I should not have gone expressly for that."

Whilst talking, Clara had taken the hairpins out of her hair and it now fell over her shoulders in a thick, wavy mass. She shook it back from her forehead, like a mane, and then rose from the floor.

"You have not done anything here yet," she said, looking round the library.

"I have put all the papers, reviews, and engravings away in the drawers."

"Can I help you?"

"No, thank you."

"Well, it is half-past ten."

When Annie was once more alone, she went on with her task. The glass-cases were already too full, but she packed many of her treasures in the bowls and so made more room for them. Every now and then she would take either a photograph or a curio to the light of the lamp, in order to have a last look at it. It was pitiful to see the girl's hands stripping the cheerful room and preparing it for silence and desertion. When she had put everything away from the chimney-piece, the brackets, and the little tables, she drew the silk curtains across the shelves of the book-cases and then glanced round the room to see that everything was right and as though to bid everything farewell. She then went away, with a grave face, little thinking that she had taken the first steps in a direction which she had never intended to follow.

CHAPTER II

THE Villars family occupied a prominent position in New York society, even among the particular set known as the "Patriarchs." They came of a race known, from father to son, for its sound and somewhat austere integrity. Their ancestor, the younger son of an aristocratic family still existing in England, had been shut up in the Tower of London, for his advanced opinions. He had managed to escape and had taken refuge in the New World, where he had founded a family, to whom he had bequeathed his republican ideas.

Annie's father, Philip Villars, had been a celebrated lawyer and a man of strict integrity. He had died young as the result of a hunting accident and, in his will, he had expressed a wish that his daughter should not go to Europe before her twenty-first birthday. He had supposed, as Frank Barnett had said, that by that time Annie would be married. As an American father very rarely interferes with the liberty of his children, he must have been very much afraid of the manœuvres of fortune-hunters.

When Annie Villars had come out, at a magnificent ball, she had been classed, not among the "belles," but among the girls known as "sweet," which means charming, and the epithet was certainly justified. She was of medium height, with good figure and graceful out-

lines. She had an exquisite complexion, rather fair dark hair, deeply tinged with gold, whilst the joy of living was reflected in her brown eyes and lighted up her whole face. Her features were small and the whole face childlike, with a slightly *retroussé* profile and a remarkable expression of force and will about the chin and mouth. She rather lacked grace and gentleness. Her step was short and quick, her movements brusque, and her way of speaking somewhat abrupt. Her voice had been cultivated and had lost that nasal intonation so displeasing to English ears, but it was a little harsh and monotonous. In spite of these characteristic defects, which would only be noticed by foreigners, she could be very charming. There was a something joyous and brilliant about her, which gave the impression of a happy, healthy, good-natured creature.

Annie Villars had grown up in a bright atmosphere, without let or hindrance. Her childhood had not been darkened by constant restrictions. She had always been accustomed to perfect freedom, to the exercise of her own will, of her faculties, and of her various tastes. She had chosen her companions, her toys, her little frocks, her sashes, and the ribbon for her hair. Her religious devotions consisted in a short prayer, night and morning, a respect for the Bible, and the observance of the Sabbath day. As for morality,—she had a horror of lies and of all vulgarity and she was charitably inclined. Her daily teaching had been simply the good example of the persons around her. This was all, but it had sufficed for making her straightforward and kind-hearted.

From the age of fourteen to eighteen, study and agreeable physical exercise had kept Annie from unwholesome reverie and morbid idleness, so that she

had passed through this critical age and developed triumphantly.

From the time she had come out, her life had been a succession of festivities. In America, the real society women are the young girls, as there is absolutely nothing to hold them back in their ardent pursuit of pleasure. They are the ones to set the fashion and to lead the dance. The married women are content to follow. They commence their day early. At eight o'clock they are up and dressed. They partake of the substantial breakfast served to the workers of the family, just as the Puritan ancestors, dressed in their coarse gowns and cambric fichus, did before them. As soon as the men have gone to business, the girls swarm into town, like so many bees. The city belongs to them absolutely, and they are just as safe there as though they were walking about in their own garden. They do their shopping, go here or there in search of news, attend lectures or charity meetings, lunch at each others' houses, or even at a restaurant. Luncheon is specially the woman's meal. After all this they go home, dress for the afternoon, and pay visits or go to receptions, where they meet the young men of their set. The day ends with dinners, balls, theatres, etc. They have had altogether some eighteen or twenty hours of pleasure.

Annie Villars was one of the most popular of New York society girls. None received more homage, more flowers, and more sweetmeats than she did. Americans are not as disinterested nowadays as they used to be. Annie's position and her great wealth had something to do with her success, but her personal attractions and her agreeableness were also appreciated. She had done her share of flirting, too, but always in a dignified way.

Flirting is no more dangerous for the American girl, as a rule, than the liberty she enjoys. She has grown up with the young men in her set and has known them all her life. This social fraternity, added to the respect which the American man has for women, makes it impossible, or at least a very rare thing, for the flirtation to be carried too far. It is merely a delightful pastime, composed of three parts of vanity and only one of sentiment. Transatlantic flirtation is love in very small, harmless doses, just enough to make the heart beat and lend to life some emotion and interest. The American woman has discovered how to play with fire without burning herself. She takes the best and most exquisite part of love and leaves the rest, disdainfully, to women of a lower order.

In spite of all that has been said of it, flirting in the United States is comparatively innocent. The moral and physical education of the American man is a safeguard. He sees in every girl the wife and mother, the sacred institution of the family, and he dare not lay a sacrilegious hand on that. He does not attempt, like the European, to poetise his animal passions, as he is more ashamed than proud of them. He does not behave towards a woman as her master, but rather as her subject. He treats her as his queen and awaits from her his signal and her favours.

Flirting with girls then is carried on in a respectful way, but flirtation with married women is quite another thing, as the ever-increasing number of divorces goes to prove.

Morality will have its public scandal in America, and when things have come to a crisis they will be readjusted.

Annie had had many admirers, but not one of them

had inspired her with any serious feeling of attachment. She had a secret preference for Frank Barnett. He was handsome, distinguished, and then he talked in an agreeable way. As he was wealthy, he had never been compelled to choose any profession and his long visits to Europe had added a certain refinement to his conversation and his general education. For the last three years he had been Annie's knight. He had kept her supplied with the rarest flowers and had always reserved the best place on his mail-coach and his yacht for her. For all this, he had been repaid, at least, by very sincere friendship. The idea that Frank might some day become her husband had often occurred to her and was not at all displeasing to her either.

Frank Barnett had many times been on the verge of declaring his love, but, as Annie had always told him that she should not marry until she had been to Europe, he had always refrained. He did not care to risk a refusal, for, with a knowledge of his own pride and of Annie's character, he had felt that such a refusal might be final.

For some years past, this trip to Europe had been Annie's one desire. She must have been very devoted to her father not to have resented the sacrifice he had imposed on her. An American woman has the keenest curiosity and Annie's had been sharpened by the stories her various friends had told her. Sometimes, on watching them pack or unpack, tears of envy had come into her eyes. During the last three months, she had been studying all the Guides, tracing a hundred different routes, and, as she came of age on the 20th of January, she had taken her ticket on the *Bourgogne,* which set sail on the 25th.

Annie had a distant cousin, ten years older than herself, who had married a Frenchman, a certain Baron de Keradieu. The previous summer, this cousin had spent a few weeks with Mrs. Villars at their country house. She had advised Annie and her mother to settle down in Paris for the season, and had promised to introduce them into society there. The prospect of balls and of all kinds of gaieties added considerably to the excitement of the European trip for Annie and Clara. The various warnings Annie had received had the effect of making her all the more anxious to meet some of the young aristocrats of whom she had been told. She loved danger and, in her heart of hearts, she rather hoped that she might have some kind of adventure which would enable her to baffle the plots of some avaricious young nobleman and show him that an American girl of good family is not tempted by titles.

Annie's two spinster aunts were very nervous about the trip for their niece. Their fears were based on certain old memories hidden away in their hearts. When they had been young and pretty, very, very many years ago, one of them had come near marrying a Roman prince and the other a Neapolitan count. At the very last moment, they had decided otherwise, for they belonged to that type of American woman which, at present, is almost extinct—the American woman who would put her Protestant faith and her country above everything else in the world.

The Misses Villars had never married and they had devoted themselves entirely to charitable works. They did not go much into society and they were not very agreeable women, but they had a great deal of influence, nevertheless, in social circles. It was thought a

great honour to know them and to be invited to their house. They had simply worshipped their brother, Philip.

A brother is, perhaps, the only man that the American woman spoils and respects, so that they now bestowed on Annie all their affection. She always knew just how to manage them and how to obtain their forgiveness for her frivolity.

The idea of the possibility of their niece marrying a foreigner was a great trouble to them, and all the more so as they did not consider their sister-in-law capable of chaperoning a young heiress in Europe and protecting her from the intrigues of fortune-hunters.

Mrs. Villars was one of those spoilt children of Providence, so frequently to be met with in America. She had been extremely pretty. Her hair had turned white at an early age, but her face had retained its youthfulness, so that, with her dark eyes, beaming with contentment, and her delicate, regular features, she was, at the age of forty-five, still very attractive. The only sorrow of her life had been the loss of her husband. She was remarkably clever in business matters and extremely practical. She was, nevertheless, as simple-minded as a child, and had no idea of the depths to which the human being can sink, nor of the moral depravity which might surround her. She was always busy from morning to night, either with her financial affairs, her charities, or her social duties. She had perfect health and a pleasant character and, added to these advantages, an almost inexhaustible cheque-book, so that she was one of the women whom people liked to invite and "Aunt Mary," as Clara, and many other girls called her, was very popular in New York society.

An American woman exercises little or no authority

over her children and, when once they are grown up, she is quite willing to forget her maternal dignity and to allow them to treat her as an elder sister. Between Annie and her mother, there was the most charming intimacy. At night, when they chatted over the events of the day, they told each other everything, including all that there was to tell about sundry flirtations, social triumphs, etc. Mrs. Villars consulted her daughter on matters of dress and about business affairs. She had absolute confidence in Annie, so that when the latter had said that she should never marry a foreigner, her mother had no further anxiety on that score. Her sisters-in-law were so persistent in their predictions that, on the whole, Mrs. Villars was glad to have her niece accompany them to Europe and so share the responsibilities.

Clara May was four years older than Annie. She was a typical American girl, physically and morally. She had a dazzling complexion, exuberant spirits, and not a vestige of what the French call *tempérament.* She was very straightforward, intelligent, and had no sentimentality at all. Among her fixed ideas, one was that America is the first country in the world, another that we are here on this earth simply to enjoy ourselves, and a third, that man was created for the sole purpose of feeding, clothing, and serving woman. Clara had had the satisfaction of refusing some of the best offers of marriage in New York. The American girl, as a rule, is by no means anxious to make a speedy marriage. The prospect of having a husband, children, and a house on her hands is not very tempting to a beautiful society girl, with money at her command. She does not accept the duties of life until she has made sure of having had a great deal of its

pleasures. She does not, even then, consent to marry a man unless she cares for him and she wants to know a man well before she accepts him for her husband.

George Ottis had not allowed himself to be discouraged by Clara's caprices. He had continued paying his court to her with a persistency which had touched her in the end, and all the more so as he was a very good-looking man.

She had accepted him at the beginning of December and, as she had promised to go to Europe with her cousin, the wedding had been fixed for an early date after the return to America. By way of a reward for his patience at the long delay, Clara had suggested to her *fiancé* that he should join them in Rome. Ever since the death of her parents, Clara May had made her home with Mrs. Villars. The two cousins were devoted to each other. One of them was prettier and more brilliant and the other was more intelligent and much more wealthy, but not a shade of envy had ever been mixed with their friendship. Clara intended to keep a strict watch on Annie and to bring her safely back to America.

There was one person in Mrs. Villars' household to whom the idea of this European trip was a source of unmixed joy. This person was Catherine Makay, Annie's old Irish nurse. She had been with the family ever since her charge was an infant in arms and had gradually become the girl's friend and almost her slave. Catherine was a tall, thin woman, with strongly-marked and almost hard features, whose face was constantly lighted up by a broad smile in which was reflected all the natural tenderness and kindliness of her nature. The instruction she had received had been of the most elementary kind, but she had in-

herited a goodly share of the soul of her country, of that passionate, idealistic soul which soars so readily towards the infinite.

She felt nature and was drawn towards all that was beautiful. She loved poetry and her memory was well stored with stories, legends, and anecdotes. She had a strong religious faith and American Catholicism had never sufficed for her. The sermons to which she listened had never given her the shudder which she used to experience at the thought of the torments of hell nor the thrill occasioned by the foretaste of the joys of Paradise. The churches in America were all too light and too new. She was longing to be able to kneel down in some old cathedral, so that she might feel nearer to God and to the Virgin.

Bonne, as she was called, had lavished on Annie, from her very cradle, not only her time, but all the treasure of her affection. The child had tormented her cruelly, by her independence of character and her disdain for all that was marvellous. The child only cared to hear stories that were true, or that seemed probable. She did not believe in fairies, thought the legends were silly, and could not feel poetry at all. She did not like caresses and effusions and she thought grand speeches ridiculous. The most comic scenes took place, constantly, between the nurse and her little charge. They quarrelled, made it up and argued endlessly. The Irishwoman had nevertheless softened the character of the little American girl, whilst the little American girl had taught the Irishwoman to be more rational, by insisting always on only listening to what was true and real.

Bonne had been wildly jealous, later on, of Annie's governess. In order to lessen the number of those

who should wait directly on her young mistress, she had appointed herself her maid. In this way, it was she who went to call Annie every morning and she always took a few flowers on the tray with a delicious cup of coffee. At night, after brushing the girl's beautiful hair, she would sit by her bedside and tell her things which she thought might interest her, sometimes things she had heard through the day and at others something about which she had been reading. Annie enjoyed listening to her, for the woman had a clever way of telling anything. When she closed her eyes, Bonne would tuck her up, kiss her, and make the sign of the cross over her. And it was this humble woman who succeeded in implanting in Annie's soul a grain of ideality which was destined to germ and blossom in Europe.

CHAPTER III

However rich they may be, American women usually travel without ostentation. Mrs. Villars only took with her Catherine Makay, her own maid, and a courier, who had travelled in that capacity with several members of her family.

Following the advice of a friend, she had engaged a suite of rooms on the first floor of the Hotel Castiglione. The proprietress, who was well-versed in the American *Who's Who,* knew the importance of her visitors and had neglected nothing, so that their first impressions should be satisfactory. When she showed them into rooms that were well heated and lighted and also decorated with flowers, they expressed their satisfaction. Through the open doors, they caught sight of a beautiful drawing-room, with painted ceiling and walls hung with brocade. The bedrooms were lofty and cheerful-looking, and the cloth was laid for dinner in the dining-room. The open fires and the flowers made everything seem so little like the ordinary hotel, that the travellers at once felt quite at home.

The following morning, as soon as she was awake, Annie went to the window to look at Paris. After surveying the Rue de Castiglione, she glanced to the left and saw the graceful spires of St. Clotilde and the Dôme of the Invalides. To the right, she had a view of the Vendôme column and the top of the Opera

House. She was enthusiastic in her admiration and, anxious to see more, she dressed as quickly as possible and, accompanied by Clara and Bonne, went to the Flower Market at the Madeleine. She bought a whole basket of flowers from Nice and some plants, and then returned to the hotel to complete their installation.

In spite of her love of travel, the American woman is devoted to her own country and her own people there. In addition to her prayer-book, her Baedeker, her diary and her address-book, she carries with her, all over the world, the portraits of her parents, frequently the photograph of a favourite animal, of her home, and, sometimes, an American flag, and a whole crowd of objects which she considers as her household gods. By means of these, she will make for herself a familiar home-like atmosphere to alleviate the banality of the hotel.

Mrs. Villars and the two girls arranged their writing-tables, reached out their personal belongings, and placed flowers about here and there. A piano was ordered and, in a very short time, they felt quite at home and did not in the least regret the splendours of their house in Washington Square.

At the end of a fortnight, Annie knew Paris better than the majority of Parisian women. The friends she knew in Europe were just then in Nice and Baroness de Keradieu was in the country, so that she had plenty of time on her hands. In the mornings, she and her cousin, accompanied either by Mrs. Villars or by Catherine, visited the churches, museums, and places of historical interest. In the afternoons, they went shopping and to their dressmakers and milliners, and finished up with a drive.

In the evenings, they read their papers and wrote

letters. American women are great letter-writers. They write with remarkable ease, without the slightest hesitation, and without erasures. Their letters are charming and are often little masterpieces. They nearly all keep diaries, and these diaries are cerebral photographs, developed very clearly and sharply outlined. They are full of shrewd observation and original remarks, but there is no trace of any sensations. A European girl would describe what she had felt, but an American girl will tell what she has seen. Between the diary of a New York or Boston girl and the diary of a Marie Bashkirtseff, there are many steps of the psychological ladder.

Engravings and photographs had so familiarised Annie with Paris that, wherever she went, she had the sentiment of having already been there. It was a keen pleasure, nevertheless, to recognise the various monuments and buildings and to admire them in the midst of their proper surroundings. She did not weep, as Bonne did, at the sight of Napoleon's tomb and Marie Antoinette's crucifix, but no historical souvenir left her indifferent.

Baroness de Keradieu returned to Paris on the 15th of February and she called the same day at the Hotel Castiglione. After the first greetings and exchange of news, she asked Annie how she liked Paris.

"I simply love it," answered the girl, "and the curious part is that I feel as much at home here, as though the Champs Elysées, the Boulevards, and the Rue de la Paix were part of New York."

"It is a fact," said Madame de Keradieu, "that American women seem less out of their element, less foreign, in Paris than the majority of French provincial women. It really is our second home."

"Oh, I do not feel as Parisian as all that," put in Clara, laughing. "The more I travel, the more I appreciate my own country."

"I hope you do not belong to those American women, who, after seeing all the treasures of the Old World, declare that it is behind the times and less civilised than New York, because the houses have not all electric light, lifts, and baths."

"Oh, I do not go as far as that. I have all due respect and admiration for Europe, but I could not live over here. After I have been here a few months, I begin to get cross. Everything irritates me, the slowness of things and people, the routine, the petty conventionalities, the necessity of being escorted about in the street, and I do not feel a free creature again until I set foot once more on the New York pavement."

"I must say, too," put in Annie, "that I was horribly disappointed with the Faubourg St. Germain. I had imagined it as one of the finest parts of Paris, and it is ugly and gloomy and dreary. I would not live there for the world. I should fancy myself in prison behind one of its gateways."

"I like it immensely," said Madame de Keradieu, smiling. "I would not change our house in the Rue Vaneau for one of the finest on the other side of the river. As to the inhabitants of the Faubourg, it is just the same thing. They are not brilliant nor what is called 'up-to-date,' but they are delightful to live with. Their courtesy and their perfect manners produce just that intangible something which is felt in really good society, a something so exquisite that it makes up for everything and nothing can make up for its absence."

"A propos of the Faubourg," interrupted Clara May,

"will you tell me how it comes about that such American women as Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Pill are received there? We are more exclusive than that at home."

"And who is receiving them?"

"Oh, princesses and duchesses——"

"Yes, but there are princesses and princesses, duchesses and duchesses. Those who receive the people you mention are only women of a lower social standing, women whose conduct has not been blameless, but who, thanks to their skilful manœuvring, have not quite lost foothold. The real Faubourg only exchanges cards with them though. Such women have recently discovered the American woman. They have opened their drawing-rooms to her, hoping, in this way, to attract young men and to be able to arrange wealthy marriages for their relatives and friends."

"And yet, in the newspaper paragraphs of fêtes given by these Americans, there were really good names, the names of good historical families."

"Yes, there is a certain set of young French men and women, even in the aristocracy, who would like to break with the old traditions and prejudices and mingle with modern society. As modern society is now represented by the upper middle class, they cannot, and do not even wish to mix with that, and so they visit foreign women. In foreign drawing-rooms, young French aristocrats of this type are made much of and they can do as they like and say what they like there. A foreign woman does not belong to any French political party, she has no family and no connections, she can be courted or neglected. In a word, she does not count."

"How flattering for the foreign woman," remarked Clara, ironically.

"Are the dinners she gives returned?" asked Annie.

"Oh, yes. She is invited to the big balls and *soirées*. She is ornamental and the women who give these entertainments are delighted to have her in their drawing-rooms. She is never invited to their private parties though. As to the real Faubourg St. Germain, its doors are closed to her and I am quite sure that neither Mrs. Robinson nor Mrs. Pill are known there. I will introduce you to my best friend, the Duchess de Blanzac, and if she takes a fancy to you, you will not lack invitations."

"When does your season begin?"

"Early in April. I hope, for your sake, that it will be a brilliant one. You will not enjoy yourself as much as in New York, perhaps, but at any rate you will see something fresh and you will take back impressions that your friends will not have had. There are many Americans who have been living in Paris for years, but who have never entered a real French home."

"Antoinette," said Clara, "I hope you are not going to chaperon us, in French style."

"Do not be alarmed. I shall be only too delighted for my friends here to see some well-educated American girls who have always been accustomed to have absolute freedom. Your own sense of propriety must then be your guide. There is one thing I would warn you about, though. There must be no flirting. Europeans do not understand that little pastime and as to Frenchmen, you must not trifle with them any more than with Cupid in person."

"That does not apply to me," said Clara, pointing to her ring.

"It must be difficult to flirt with foreign men," remarked Annie, gravely.

"I advise you not to try it, at any rate."

"And now, Antoinette, will you promise one thing?" asked Clara.

"What is it?"

"That you will not attempt to get Annie married over here?"

"I promise that, willingly, so that you may be quite tranquil on that score. I should be delighted if she married a Frenchman, but I shall not help her to do so, for many reasons. In the first place, your aunts would never forgive me."

"And I should not either."

"How absurd you are," remarked Annie, shrugging her shoulders.

"Antoinette," said Mrs. Villars, changing the subject, "these girls have been waiting for you before they ordered their evening dresses."

"I am glad to hear it, for I enjoy choosing dresses."

"I count on you for sparing me some of this worry," continued Mrs. Villars. "My French is good enough for the Louvre and the Bon Marché, but it will never do for conversation in French society."

"Oh, we will help you. Henri will be delighted to escort them to the Bois. He is quite looking forward to teasing them once more."

"Oh, your husband is delightful," said Annie.

"He is not a bad sort—for a Frenchman," answered Madame de Keradieu, smiling. "He is coming to call on you between five and six. I think he is going to take us all to the theatre. The day after to-morrow, we want you to come to a little informal dinner. You will have to excuse the fact that the house is not in order. I am very glad that we had to come back earlier than usual, on account of the repairs we are

having done, as it will give you an opportunity of meeting a few of our friends quietly, before the season commences. You will be able to get used to these *dreadful foreigners,* in that way. I must go now, as I am over head and ears in arrangements."

Annie and Clara could not have had a better cicerone for introducing them into Parisian society than the Baroness de Keradieu. No other American woman, who had married into the French aristocracy, had denationalised herself so well and acquired so admirably the manners and tone of the Faubourg. Antoinette Lindsay had been extremely beautiful. She had made the acquaintance of her husband when passing a winter in Rome. At that time Monsieur de Keradieu was merely an attaché to the Embassy and not at all wealthy. Antoinette had only a small fortune left her by her grandmother. The marriage, on both sides, had been one of inclination. They had spent three years in Washington, as the Baron had managed to get himself sent there, and had then returned to Paris.

Antoinette was received coldly, and even with distrust, by her husband's family. After the birth of her son, she became a Catholic. This seemed to bring her nearer to her new relatives and, in the end, she won their love and esteem.

The Baron's parents bought a villa at Cannes and they then gave up to the young couple their château of Moncour, in Touraine, and their town house in Paris, in the Rue Vaneau.

The Keradieus were not rich enough to be able to keep up much style, but their home was a most agreeable one.

The Baroness was always most charming to her American friends who happened to come to Paris.

She took them to the theatre and to the Bois, invited them to her house, but she never asked for invitations for them, nor did she introduce them anywhere. During her last visit to America, she had been greatly annoyed and very indignant at the wrong notions people had about the French aristocracy. She had persuaded Annie and her cousin to come and spend a season in Paris and had offered to introduce them into society, hoping that, in this way, they might be able to see for themselves the truth of things. It was by means of this idea that Providence made use of Madame de Keradieu, in the working out of Annie's destiny.

CHAPTER IV

THE Marquis d'Anguilhon, seated at a large Louis XV. writing-desk, with a cigar between his lips and a red pencil in his hand, was reckoning up his debts. The drawn look on his face showed clearly enough the painful effort that this task was costing him. When he had jotted down the various sums taken from his pocketbook and then those of a large number of bills, he added them up once, and then a second time, and wrote down the total in huge, maddening figures. After this, he flung the pencil down, and threw all the odious papers pell-mell into a drawer. Turning his armchair round towards the fireplace, he sat down again, crossed his legs, gazed with a fixed expression at the blaze, and was very soon entirely absorbed in his reflections. The firelight played over him in the most artistic way.

He was evidently a man of good lineage, a man to whom the finishing touch had been given. He gave the impression of extreme, and even ultra, refinement, an impression not appreciated by all people. It was difficult to say whether he would be called handsome. The face, with its straight nose, was usually cold and impassive. Life and its cares had marked it with lines of force and the brown eyes would light up to a golden brown under the influence of tender feeling. The dark hair, dull white complexion, and tawny

monstache lent a warm colouring, whilst the high forehead and full lips revealed a characteristic mingling of the sensual and the ideal. A ring of the bell interrupted the Marquis d'Anguilhon's meditations. He went himself to the door and brought back into the room a man of about forty years of age, of somewhat vulgar appearance but with an intelligent and pleasing face. The arrival of a woman for whom he cared could not have delighted Jacques more than this visitor.

"Sit down there, Bontemps," he said, pointing to an armchair near the fire.

"I am glad you are back, Monsieur le Marquis. When I received your note, I was just going to write and advise you to come back to Paris."

"Really? Why?"

"I will tell you just now. I fancy that you will lead up yourself to what I have to say. Will you tell me first what it is that you want at present?"

"What I want? Why, money, of course. You know that very well."

"Times are rather difficult—and it is scarce, Monsieur le Marquis."

"Money is always scarce when it is needed," said Jacques, bitterly. "You are a man of resources, though, and you can find me some, if you feel inclined to do so."

"It is not the inclination that is lacking, you may be sure. If the figure you want is not too big——"

"I want a hundred thousand francs."

Monsieur Bontemps started.

"You are joking," he said.

"Not in the least. I want a hundred thousand francs," the young man repeated, speaking very distinctly.

"And what security do you offer?"

"These pictures and tapestries and all that is here. They are worth more than that sum."

"More?"

"Why, certainly. They are beautiful relics of the past," said the Marquis, glancing sadly round the room at the treasures in question.

"You have been gambling?"

"No, I have spent three months in Algeria, a few days at Cannes with my uncle de Froissy, and I have not been once to Monte Carlo. I am, nevertheless, on the brink of the precipice."

"Again?"

"It is always the same thing and it always will be as long as I have not a fortune in accordance with my tastes and my instincts—tastes and instincts which I have inherited and which are older than I am myself. I can feel that quite well. When Providence creates beings of my stamp, it should provide them with wealth, if it wants to be merciful, but it does not wish to be merciful, it cannot be, for the simple reason that it must have contrasts; it must have oppositions for the sake of producing suffering. I give twenty francs where I have not the right to spend two sous. The ten thousand francs income I possess gives me the opportunity of spending three times as much. I have no profession, no talent to turn to account, and no immediate expectation of even a legacy. On the other hand, I have too much pride left to live at the expense of my tradespeople and too much dignity to make my living out of gambling. The poverty to which I am reduced makes me nervously weak, so that life does not seem worth living and the revolver will probably be the end of it all. Now Bontemps, you

must help me, once for all, to get out of my difficulties. When my father died, you proved yourself to be our best friend. You helped us then to keep our family home and I count on you to help me now."

"In the first place, Monsieur le Marquis, I should want to know what you propose doing with the hundred thousand francs?"

"I propose paying my creditors first. I have just made out the list of my debts. Here it is," continued the young man, taking up the paper written in red pencil. "The total amount is sixty thousand francs and then I should want forty thousand francs for going to Africa."

"To Africa?"

"Yes. A certain Spanish proverb says: 'A poor nobleman has only three paths open to him: the Church, the royal household, and the sea.' I have no vocation for the first, the second no longer exists in our country, so that there is only the sea left. I intend taking that path and am going to join an expedition for exploring the left bank of the Niger."

"*Mon Dieu*, do you mean it? But who put that idea into your head?"

"Young Delorme, a very decent, straightforward fellow, the banker's son. I saw a great deal of him when we were both doing our time in the army. You know, perhaps, that, to the surprise of every one, his father died insolvent and it was even said that he committed suicide. George gave up to the creditors the money he had inherited from his mother. It would have been enough to have lived upon very comfortably. That will give you an idea of the sort of man he is. He went out to the Soudan, and from there to Dahomey, where he is at present managing a factory. He speaks

so enthusiastically of the work to be done in Africa, that he has made me wish to take part in it. I shall start with an exploring expedition and if I come back safe and sound, George Delorme will put me in the way of some work."

"Work! You, Monsieur le Marquis?" exclaimed Bontemps, with an expression of pity in his voice. "I think you are capable of winning glory, but I doubt if you would earn money. One cannot suddenly become a financier, a manufacturer, a tradesman, or indeed a business man of any kind without some kind of apprenticeship. Whenever I see an aristocrat, who knows, perhaps, no more of figures than his multiplication-table, rushing into the struggle for gain with experienced business men, he reminds me of a cock amongst a lot of foxes and I know beforehand that he will soon be plucked, feathered, and devoured."

"Then what do you think a poor aristocrat should do, Bontemps?"

"He should simply make a rich marriage, Monsieur le Marquis."

"Like Augier's character in the play, he should marry Monsieur Poirier's daughter? I have tried to bring myself to follow that example, but I cannot. Marriage is much more alarming than Africa."

"But supposing there were to be an exceptionally favourable opportunity?"

"Have you any one to propose, Bontemps?" asked Jacques d'Anguilhon, smiling.

"Not exactly that, but you may have heard of the very wealthy American girl whom the Baroness de Keradieu is introducing this season."

"No, I only arrived yesterday morning and I have not seen any one yet."

"Well, you should have a try there. She is an only child and belongs to a very good family. She will have at least sixty millions."

"Sixty million francs!" exclaimed Jacques.

"Yes; that is the wife and fortune you ought to have."

"I suppose she is one of the American girls in search a title."

"Unfortunately she is not. She is a Protestant, very devoted to her own country, and she will not marry in Europe. The Duc de Randan is paying great attention to her at present, but all to no purpose, it appears."

"Then what chance should I have?"

"Who knows? Perhaps Providence, whom you were abusing just now, has brought this heiress from America expressly for you."

"I should be very much surprised at that."

"I should not. You have too many good qualities, Monsieur le Marquis, for it to be possible that your race is destined to die out with you."

The young man's face lighted up with pleasure, for a moment, at these words.

"Thanks, Bontemps," he said. "You are no flatterer, so that the compliment is worth something coming from you. But what made you think of this marriage for me?"

"I can take no credit for it, as the idea was suggested to me."

"Suggested? But is there any one else who is interested in my business affairs, may I ask?" asked Jacques, somewhat haughtily.

"Well, you see, I have an old friend, who, in her way, is a remarkable woman. Before her marriage, she was a governess and companion. Her husband was

an aristocrat who had come down in the world and was a failure as an artist, into the bargain. He had the good sense, at any rate, to make his exit from this world. His widow resolved to make a little fortune for herself and her two children. She began by selling curiosities and all kinds of artistic things and, thanks to her education and her natural aptitudes, she soon became quite a connoisseur. Her business gradually increased and she has the most astounding judgment and sagacity, so that I have often been glad to consult with her. She lends money, buys and sells houses, and even looks out for heiresses for her needy customers, when she thinks they are deserving. She declares that she has not a single unhappy marriage on her conscience. She knows people in all classes of society and this fact gives her considerable influence. Her private room is a veritable confessional box and the poor unfortunates who go to her in their trouble always get some consolation and help. I really owe my present position to her, for she helped me to put my foot in the stirrup. I dine with her once a week and she often takes me out driving with her. The day before yesterday, we were coming back from the Bois when we met this heiress. My friend told me what she had heard about her and she also spoke of the sensation that the idea of this huge fortune had made in the Faubourg. All at once, she broke off and, turning to me, said: 'I cannot think of any one but the Marquis d'Anguilhon, who is capable of carrying off this golden fleece. You should write to him at once and advise him to go in for it. It would be a pity for all those millions to be lost to France.'"

"But does your friend know me?" asked Jacques, surprised.

"Oh, Madame de Lène knows every one. She must have seen you, for she declares that you would make an impression on this Miss Villars. This inspiration of hers is, perhaps, a very happy one and, at any rate, after what you have just told me, it would be worth while thinking it over, would it not, Monsieur le Marquis?"

The young man was silent for a few minutes and then, passing his hand over his forehead, he said slowly:

"I am quite bewildered by such a proposal. You see for the last few months I have been living with this dream of the African expedition, and it would cost me a great deal to give it up now."

"It is a dream though, as you say. It is all very heroic and glorious, but it would take you very far away from your own country and it often happens that men do not come back from those distant lands. Remember that you are the last of your family, Monsieur le Marquis."

The expression of Jacques' face changed visibly and his eyelids quivered.

"Take my advice," continued Bontemps, "go to the Opera this evening. Miss Villars is going with Monsieur and Madame de Keradieu. Take your best opera-glasses and look at her. That will be better than all my arguments. I would not go into their box though, afterwards. So much depends on the introduction, that it would be wiser for you to choose the time and the place for yours."

"Well, I will go to the Opera, Bontemps. But—what about the money, what are you going to do about that?"

"I cannot think of any one but Madame de Lène

who might be able to help you. If you will give me permission, I will speak to her."

"Good. Do so, by all means."

"I will bring you her reply to-morrow at eleven and then you might tell me what you think about this marriage."

"That is what I call driving a man to extremities," said Jacques, laughing.

"It is for your own good, Monsieur le Marquis, it is entirely for your own good. I hope you will think it over this evening and then sleep upon it, but I have more faith in this evening and the Opera. Just think —a dowry of sixty million francs!" With these words, which he flung out like an anchor for the mind of the young man to seize upon, the lawyer took his leave.

CHAPTER V

JACQUES bore one of the proudest names in France, a name that is to be found on every page of the annals of royalty and feudalism. It is mentioned by Joinville, Froissart, Saint-Simon, and Madame de Sévigné. Few families possess such glorious records as the Anguilhons. During the minority of Louis XIII., a d'Anguilhon had held almost royal authority, and under Louis XV. the fortunes of the family attained their highest prosperity. From that time forward, they had gradually declined and at the present moment the last representative of that brilliant line owned nothing but a town house, burdened with a heavy mortgage, and an income which was most inadequate. Jacques' lot in life seemed to give the lie to the family proverb that there would always be "glory, love, and money for a d'Anguilhon."

In our modern society, it is no longer a question of serving the king, but of serving humanity. Every one has to pay his way with his own intelligence and his work. Each man must dig and delve, in order to discover something new and something useful, if he is to win any position or wealth.

The Marquis d'Anguilhon did not belong to the race of diggers and, although he was intelligent, he had not the great gifts of his ancestors. The descendant of those d'Anguilhons who had given such valiant

statesmen, soldiers, and savants to France had merely taken his college degree and had never been able to decide upon a profession. The army did not attract him, as the France of to-day did not appeal to Jacques. He bore his country a grudge for having given itself over to the *bourgeois*. He considered that it had lost caste and, although if need were, he would, of course, help to defend France, as his family had done in 1870, still he did not care, under present circumstances, to serve under the Republican government.

When quite a young man, Jacques had been fully aware of the progressive diminution of the family fortune. He was eighteen when the Château de Blonay had been sold and the sale of the old home, so full of associations, had been a great grief to him. As long as his father had lived, he had good horses, carriages, and enough money at his disposal. By dint of battling with his money-lenders and creditors, the old Marquis had managed to keep up his house in good style. The long struggle had finally killed him and when, at his death, the crash came, it was more disastrous than had been anticipated.

The beautiful town house was let to the Portuguese Embassy. The Marchioness took refuge in a small house belonging to her brother. He let it to her for a nominal rent and she was only able to take with her two of her old servants. Jacques had to put up with just a bedroom and his uncle's studio, a room with a large bay window. Thanks to some furniture and tapestries that they had managed to save for him, he had a very comfortable and even luxurious-looking abode.

The young man was reduced to an income produced by a life interest in a capital of two hundred

thousand francs, which one of his great aunts had left him. She had been the bogey of his childhood and, in her will, she had left this money to him "for cigars —or bread."

Jacques had, therefore, had to learn what poverty meant and he had suffered cruelly. His suffering had been that of a person accustomed always to walking on soft carpets and suddenly obliged to go a long distance, barefooted, over cold, sharp pebbles. Jacques' feet did not get hardened and, consequently, they bled all the time. His poverty wounded his pride and tortured his heart. It made his face look old, took the light out of his eyes, and gradually he became hard, bitter, and thoroughly unhappy. His suffering was quite as much on his mother's account as on his own.

The Marchioness had not managed to keep her husband's affection a very long time, but her maternal love had been her safeguard and her one joy. The passion she had put into this had been repaid by Jacques with a filial love which was certainly more intense than any other feeling in his nature. The thought of his mother being deprived of the luxury to which she had always been accustomed weighed heavily on his mind, and he was simply amazed at her resignation. In her modest home, in the Rue de Bellechasse, she seemed to him more dignified than in her former surroundings. He was surprised to see how easily she moved about in such limited space. When he was in Paris, he always lunched with her and, later on in the day, between six and seven o'clock, he would call in again, tell her what he had been doing, and they would perhaps have a little music together. They both enjoyed this hour thoroughly. When he had anything to annoy him, he would sit

down at his mother's feet, rest his head against her, and remain there sometimes, absolutely silent. She never asked him any questions, at such times, but she would talk to him gently about her own hopes for the future and the reasons she had to believe that there were better days in store for them. She would speak, too, of her confidence in God, and with such sincere conviction that her son always left her with fresh courage and a lighter heart.

After the settlement of his father's affairs, Jacques had left Paris, not intending to return there, except from time to time to see his mother. He had wandered about for some time, without any fixed plan, but had gradually begun to long for his old haunts and the society to which he had been accustomed. He had been welcomed back again, for he was on friendly terms with half the Faubourg and then, too, his name counted for something. He might very easily have spent six months of the year as a guest at some of the best châteaux of France, hunting or shooting as the case might be, but, under present circumstances, he did not care to accept hospitality outside his own family circle, or that of a few very intimate friends.

For a time he had entertained the idea of marrying some wealthy girl in his own set, but a large fortune would have been necessary and large fortunes are rare in the Faubourg. He had then thought of an American wife, after the style of the Baroness de Keradieu, and he had even ventured to suggest the idea to the Marchioness Taller, a Boston woman who already had several Franco-American marriages on her conscience. A few months later, she had introduced him to a Miss Ellis, an orphan, who was very pretty, who had ten million francs, and who wanted to marry a man with

a title. She was charmed with Jacques and, having decided that she would accept him, she considered that he must first go through his probation. The American woman is always too practical to be thoroughly generous and everything with her must pay. It is very probable that even in the next world she will take steps to be sure of getting full value for her money.

Miss Ellis, therefore, began the great game of flirtation with Jacques. She expected him to be here, there, and everywhere. Now that she knew a Marquis, she wanted to show him off, to have him always in attendance on her. She accepted his flowers, but was extremely capricious, encouraging him one day and discouraging him the next. Jacques thought this conduct horribly vulgar and he soon showed that he did not care to be any woman's plaything and thereupon turned his back on Miss Ellis and her millions.

The Count de Froissy, his mother's brother, had no children, so that he might very easily have helped his nephew, but Jacques' uncle considered that the Anguilhons had never had the slightest idea of the value of money and he wished his nephew to have some experience of the pinch of poverty. The Countess de Froissy was Jacques' godmother and his mother's best friend. She occasionally gave her nephew a few banknotes of a thousand francs to spend in travelling and this was certainly an excellent inspiration.

When abroad, Jacques felt that his poverty was not so hard to bear. Whilst staying at hotels, it always seemed to him that the existing conditions of his life were only momentary. He visited Egypt, Turkey, and Russia and became quite fond of travelling.

As he was thrown a great deal on his own resources, Jacques began to read eagerly and his reading put

him in touch with ideas that were quite new to him. He was amazed, somewhat disturbed, but nevertheless interested. His mental horizon gradually became wider, and the Faubourg St. Germain, which he had hitherto always considered as the Holy Ark, now appeared to him as a very small and comparatively unimportant chapel. Among the young men of the aristocracy, not one had been more exclusive and more rigid than Jacques. Nothing outside his own immediate little circle had ever inspired him with either curiosity or interest. Politics were simply odious to him. He did just know the name of the President, but he had never known the names of the Ministers. From the time that the men of his world were no longer at the helm, the ship of France might weather any storms without this affecting him. The little he knew of things generally, he owed to the *Figaro* and the *Gaulois,* as those two papers manage to make their readers absorb a certain amount of contemporary history, literature, and science daily. As to modern society, he knew something of the upper middle class, but he did not frequent it and he heartily detested it. The idea of its possessing châteaux, racehorses, and studs made him feel something akin to the sentiment which big children experience when the little ones get hold of their toys. At the Opera, when he saw the wives of well-known financiers somewhat overdressed and wearing too many diamonds, he would smile disdainfully, and he felt an almost wicked satisfaction on seeing the sons of these people already going to the bad, thanks to the pace at which they were living.

When travelling, Jacques had met with savants and men who worked hard. When with them he had felt

his own inferiority most keenly, and had fully realised where the power of the ruling class of to-day lay.

At Brussels, he had happened to come across the army comrade of whom he had spoken to Monsieur Bontemps. The young man told him that he was starting for the Soudan, where he had obtained a post as manager of an important factory. He hoped to win both money and glory—the money in order to pay off his father's creditors and the glory for the sake of clearing the old family name from the discredit of the failure.

He spoke enthusiastically of Africa and of his future. He considered that it was the work of a true patriot to spread the influence of France and to open up new channels for its commerce. He was bold enough to express his surprise that the young men of the aristocracy were not tempted to go out there in search of adventure and even to organise exploring expeditions.

The Marquis was greatly impressed by George Delorme's words. They seemed to touch the chords of heroism and of patriotism which existed in the young man's soul, just as they had existed in the soul of every member of the Anguilhon family. His whole face lighted up and there was a bright gleam in his eyes as he listened. When his friend left him, he was greatly excited and he spent a great part of the night thinking things over.

Thanks to the impression he had received, a brilliant idea had suddenly come to him. Why should not he enter the ranks of those explorers who are quite as much the glory of their country as the savants and the artists? It required quite as much courage to risk death in the wilds of Africa as on the battlefield. His bravery had never been put to any severe test, but he

knew that he was brave. One of his ancestors had been with St. Louis to Tunis and was killed there. It would be a worthy epilogue to the family history if he, the last of the Anguilhons, should die whilst on an exploring expedition in Africa. He remembered the strange fascination which some African photographs, he had seen in a shop window in the Rue de Solferino, had exercised over him. He wondered if that were not a sign that he was destined to live his life out there? Those wonderful photographs taken in Dahomey, in the Soudan, had given him a sensation of dazzling light and of intense heat. He could recall that sensation now and it was with that light in his eyes that he fell asleep.

The following day, he informed George Delorme of his intention to go to Africa and asked him to help him to find out how he could go. His friend told him that there was a question of sending out a scientific and political mission to the left bank of the Niger, and that it would probably be entrusted to a certain Captain Richard, a man of great experience. George Delorme added that by applying at once, through some one influential, to the Colonial Minister, he might possibly get the second post in this expedition. Jacques was most eager to obtain this, as a dangerous and far-distant voyage appealed to him.

His friend promised to keep him well posted and to do all in his power for him.

The two young men spent a week together in Brussels. They talked constantly of Africa, made wonderful plans, and encouraged each other as much as possible. When they parted, they shook hands with each other heartily, as though sealing a compact.

The Marquis returned to Paris, full of en-

thusiasm and as impatient as a child to carry out his plan.

The thought of the sorrow he would cause his mother somewhat disturbed his mind. He wondered whether it would be better not to speak to her of his intentions until the last moment, or to tell her at once, and, finally, he decided on the latter course.

The very day after his return to Paris, he accordingly announced his decision. The Marchioness was very brave over it, and even experienced a certain pride on hearing that her son was at last seized with a desire to take up some work and to win glory.

"If it is God's will," she said, simply, "that you should leave me, He will give me strength to bear your absence and your departure. Until then I can go on hoping."

Jacques then informed his uncle of his intentions. Monsieur de Froissy congratulated him warmly and promised to take the necessary steps in order to obtain for him a creditable post in the expedition.

George Delorme kept his word. He wrote to Jacques once a fortnight, in order to keep him posted, and his letters served to keep up the enthusiasm. Jacques opened them with as much emotion as though they were love letters. His hands trembled with excitement as he tore the envelope and he read them over and over again. They inspired him with an ever-increasing curiosity about Africa. That mysterious country fascinated him now just as some woman, reputed to be dangerous and different from any other, might have done.

In order to calm his impatience, he had started for Algeria in January, and had spent two months in the South there. He had been training himself to all

kinds of privations and had gone on long walking expeditions. He had tried the strength of his muscles and of his constitution and had been proud to find they bore the test well.

In March, he had received a letter from George, telling him that the expedition to the left bank of the Niger was now finally settled. He spoke with great admiration of Captain Richard, to whom the mission was entrusted, and he urged upon Jacques the necessity of applying at once if he really wished to join it.

The young Marquis at once left Biskra and went straight to his uncle's estate, the Château de St. Michel, near Cannes. He talked things over with him and it was decided that his uncle should at once make the necessary application. Jacques then returned to Paris to put his affairs in order. He had debts, of course, as a member of his family without debts had never been known. A few wild extravagances, of one kind or another, the difficulty he had in denying himself anything, had plunged him into financial difficulties. He had written to Bontemps and the worthy lawyer had shown him a much more easy way out of his difficulties. Here was a possible marriage with a dowry of sixty million francs.

The idea of such an enormous fortune somewhat dazzled him. It brought him down to earth again from the more elevated regions in which he had been living in his dreams.

Sixty millions! It meant peace and happiness for his mother, the restoration of their fallen fortunes, the probable continuation of their race. He could live at Blonay again and it meant all the power and luxury that he loved, and all this a woman could give him.

His thoughts went back to Miss Ellis and, in comic dismay, he asked himself what this heiress might want in return for her money.

Although Monsieur Bontemps had spoken of Madame de Lène in a very tactful way, Jacques understood that, among her various other occupations, she served as a matchmaker and that her services were not entirely disinterested. The idea of having recourse to a matrimonial agent was so repugnant to him, that twice over he said aloud: "No, no, it is quite impossible."

He then tried to take up the thread once more of his dream of adventure and glory, but he could not. It all seemed vague and unreal, like a dream that vanishes when we are roused too suddenly. His mind, too, was full of the thought of the sixty millions and of all that it would mean.

"I will go and see this American girl, at any rate," he said to himself. "Perhaps she will inspire me with an invincible dislike. Everything would then be easy and I should not have the slightest regret at throwing such a chance away."

When once he had made up his mind, Jacques dressed quickly and went straight to the box-office at the Opera. He examined the plan and chose a good place for his observations. He took a seat in one of the boxes on the third floor, one of those boxes in the side gallery. He knew that by sitting at the back, in the shade, he could look down into the Keradieu's box, without being seen himself.

Bontemps' suggestion had disturbed his mind to such a degree that he was in a highly nervous state all the rest of the day. He had the greatest difficulty in concealing his agitation from his mother. In order

not to meet any of his friends, he knew that he must go to the Opera either very early or quite late. He chose the latter alternative, as he felt too impatient to wait there long.

He was as slow as possible over dinner and then he went for a drive to the entrance to the Bois. At half-past ten, he went quietly to the box he had chosen, and, taking out his opera-glass, proceeded to look round the house. He soon saw that the Baron de Keradieu and his wife were in their box in the lower circle, but to his consternation, instead of the one American girl he had expected to see, there were two.

Bontemps had not foreseen this possibility and he had not described the heiress. Jacques was greatly perplexed. He looked at Clara first and did not care for her at all. She was too tall, too pink and white, and reminded him distinctly of Miss Ellis. He thought Annie was charming. He noticed the whiteness of her skin, the smallness of her mouth, and her pretty figure. He kept his glasses fixed on her, examining her in the most merciless way and trying to guess her character. He came to the conclusion that she would make a very presentable Marchioness d'Anguilhon and that he would be quite capable of falling in love with her. If she should prove to be Miss Villars, the question was what should he do?

Jacques was just in the right frame of mind for thinking of marriage. His heart was quite free and ready for any serious attachment.

At twenty-one, he had had a very passionate love-affair and this had died away, after consuming all his youthful ardour. Since then, he had had various fleeting fancies, but they had never been of long duration. He was one of those men who seem destined to attract

women's love. His poverty and his anxiety about the future had also prevented him from committing himself seriously.

On leaving the Opera that night, he was a prey to the most cruel indecision. He went straight home, as he wanted to shut himself up and think matters out. To go to bed was quite out of the question, so he set a light to his fire, and, with a cigar between his lips, sat down to ask himself, in the silence of the night, what he was going to do. The choice lay between marriage and Africa. When he decided on marriage, the exploring expedition seemed to him most fascinating, but five minutes later, he had a vision of Miss Villars and her millions. All night long, one of those royal battles was waged in the young man's mind which must delight the gods, one of those battles between the higher and the lower sentiments, between the best and the worst of human nature.

When day began to break, Jacques' face bore traces of this struggle and, from its expression, it was very evident that there had been a moral defeat. He had chosen the wealthy marriage.

"I must go with the times," he had said to himself. "A dowry of sixty million francs is not to be met with every day. If I do not succeed there, I shall have Africa to fall back upon."

And so he had gone with the times, when it would have been finer not to have gone with them. Yes, Africa and its dangers are always there, but the fact that he had not preferred them to money had lowered him in his own estimation.

When he had finally made up his mind, he went to bed.

"I wonder what my fate is to be?" he asked himself

once more. "If I am to marry this American girl, then why, for the last nine months, has this other affair been allowed to haunt me? If, on the other hand, I am to take part in this African expedition, why should the idea of this marriage have been put into Madame de Lène's mind? What is the good of it all, I wonder?"

With this question on his lips, Jacques went to sleep.

What is the good of it all? We cannot tell and yet everything is good. There is nothing useless in the moral world any more than in the material world. Unrealised dreams, impotent desires, apparently fruitless efforts, and the most fleeting thoughts are all the threads which serve to weave human lives, to shade and diversify them, and to bind them to each other, and it is only the study of these Invisibles that can teach us how and whither we are led.

Before Jacques had finished dressing, his lawyer arrived.

"Ah, you gave me a nice riddle to solve," said the young man, concealing his anxiety with a smile. "There were two American girls with the Keradieus, last night. How do you suppose I could tell which was which?"

"*Sapristi,*" exclaimed Bontemps. "I completely forgot the cousin. Well, Monsieur le Marquis, which do you want to be Miss Villars?"

"The shorter of the two, of course. The one with the dark blond hair."

"Then you are in luck."

"Is she the one? Are you sure?" asked the Marquis, with evident emotion.

"I am quite sure."

"Thank God. The other one would not have suited

me at all. I should have always looked as though I were going about with the American flag."

"Well, that would not be very bad company."

"No, but I should prefer a wife of a less pronounced type. I like the looks of Miss Villars."

"Then you have made up your mind, I hope."

The colour came into Jacques' face and he only replied by a nod.

"I congratulate you," said Monsieur Bontemps.

"No need," replied the young man drily.

"Excuse me, but it is certainly the wisest step you could take."

"I only regret that I am not capable of certain follies."

"And I, Monsieur le Marquis, I only hope you may succeed as regards this marriage, for I heard some bad news, yesterday. The Portuguese Embassy is to have a house of its own, so that your lease will not be renewed. You would find it very difficult to let your house, on account of the high rent, so that you might have to sell it."

"That is the last straw," said Jacques with an ironical smile.

"After things have been at their worst, they must get better," remarked the lawyer, encouragingly.

"And what are we going to do about these debts?" asked Jacques. "I must have my mind at rest, if I am to make love. You know how nervous I am. If I get a bill that I cannot pay, I am bad-tempered all day long. Have you spoken to your friend?"

"Yes, she will lend you a hundred thousand francs. The only thing is, she insists, absolutely, on two conditions, if she is to lend you the money."

"And what are they?"

"In the first place, you must give up your exploring expedition and devote yourself entirely to Miss Villars. Then you must talk to the Duchess de Blanzac and get her to take this marriage in hand."

"Does Madame de Lène know the Duchess de Blanzac?" asked Jacques, in amazement.

"Very well indeed. She was once companion to her aunt and she now advises her in all her business matters."

The Marquis d'Anguilhon strongly objected to the idea of making use of the Duchess de Blanzac in this affair. "I should prefer asking the Keradieus to help me," he said. "The Baron is one of my greatest friends and his wife has always been extremely kind to me."

"They would not be able to help you at all in this matter. The Duchess de Blanzac seems to have taken a great fancy to Miss Villars. She invites her often and probably knows her thoroughly well by now. She will very likely be able to give you a few hints about her character, which will help you to act in the best way possible. Do not make any mistake about it. You will have no easy task if you are to win this girl."

"So much the better, it will be all the more interesting," answered Jacques.

"So much the worse, you mean," said the practical Bontemps. "At any rate, you will need a friend at court. Madame de Blanzac influences every one who approaches her. She is a very shrewd and very intelligent woman of the world. Madame de Lène is convinced that you would never succeed without her help, and that is why she asks you to allow yourself to be guided by her."

"But supposing that she should refuse to help me?"

"Oh, it is your affair to persuade her, and I should advise you not to lose a moment. Try to see the Duchess de Blanzac this very day and let me know the result. I will tell Madame de Lène, so that she may make the necessary arrangements for advancing you the hundred thousand francs."

"At what interest will she lend the money?"

"At the usual rate, six per cent."

"And how much is her advice to cost me?" asked Jacques, slightly embarrassed.

"Twenty-five thousand francs."

"Very cheap," remarked Jacques.

"Very cheap," repeated the lawyer, curtly.

"I am very much afraid, Bontemps, that you and Madame de Lène are leading me on to what will prove to be a failure and a disappointment."

"I should be very sorry, myself, if your words proved to be true. Whenever I see one of our old monuments disappear, or one of our old families die out, it seems to me that France is losing some of her glory. I should consider myself very lucky, if, through any help of mine, your house should be restored. And now we must go to work. Do not forget to call at my office, or to send me a line, when you have seen the Duchess de Blanzac."

When he had reached the door, Bontemps turned round and faced Jacques.

"I have an idea that this marriage will take place. Madame de Lène brings good luck to people."

"Well, we shall see," answered Jacques.

CHAPTER VI

Among the women of the Faubourg St. Germain, the Duchess de Blanzac stood out like a figure in relief, and this relief was due to the contrasts in her own nature.

Her mother had been of exceedingly fair complexion and her father very dark. Their two temperaments were discernible in her. By her lithe and supple figure and her sapphire eyes she was "blonde," whilst from her father she had inherited her thick chestnut hair, streaked with dull gold tints, her warm white complexion, and her vigour. She had a strongly defined, hard profile, an intellectual face with beautiful, sad eyes, a sensitive mouth, with strongly marked corners, which betrayed her most fleeting impressions.

Tall and slender, with a long waist and rather sloping shoulders, Christiane seemed to have been cast in the mould of antique times. There was an unconscious pride about her. She carried her head well and her deportment was admirable. It was as though she possessed what American women, curiously enough, call "royal muscle."

Whenever she appeared at any gathering, all eyes turned towards her and kept looking at her again, as though fascinated by her charm. No one thought of what she was wearing, but everything she wore looked

well on her. She was not "chic," but she had the true elegance, which is personal and can never be imitated.

In her character, as in her temperament, there seemed to be a mixture of the brunette and the blonde, of strength and gentleness. Her brain was intensely active, whilst her imperious nature was made to rule, to command. Education and convention had taught her self-restraint, but not submission. She had a loving heart, but no love, an ardent soul with no religion, brilliant faculties, and no use for them. Christiane should have felt the breath of the Renaissance blowing over her; she would have been in her element amid the political and religious passions of the sixteenth century. She was not fitted for the narrow circle in which our modern great ladies live their lives. Unconsciously urged on by her ideas and her sentiment, she would leave the beaten track occasionally and accomplish some generous act, or give way to some enthusiastic impulse. She was then taxed with being eccentric, for even those who loved her best did not thoroughly understand her.

The Duchess de Blanzac had not only two temperaments, with which to contend. She came of two races, which were in direct contrast with each other. Her mother was descended from one of those French dukes who signed their name, adding "by the grace of God," just as the king did, whilst her father was a son of Basque peasants, but a peasant's son for whom Providence had reserved a brilliant destiny. His parents had been drowned on their way out to Brazil. The boy had been rescued and, later on, adopted by one of the passengers, Baron Soria, a Portuguese banker, living at Rio de Janeiro. After the death of his

benefactor, who left him not only his name, but his fortune, he came to Paris to settle down. He was, at first, treated rather as a foreign *parvenu,* but having, on several occasions, proved himself not only a good Frenchman, but a man who did honour to his country, he was finally received everywhere. When he met Gabrielle d'Arançay, Christiane's mother, he fell passionately in love with her. Although belonging to a very good, old family, the girl had a very insignificant dowry and she was also an orphan, living with an aunt who did not make her very welcome. Neither her birth nor her beauty had sufficed for procuring a husband for her of her own rank. Baron Soria was a good-looking man and there was nothing vulgar about him, either in his appearance or manners. He had a large fortune and was considered a good match, so that when he asked for Gabrielle's hand, he was not refused. The girl was now twenty-five years of age and had lost some of her early illusions, so that she was willing to consent to a *mésalliance,* which would, at any rate, give her wealth and so help her to realise some of her dreams.

After three years of married life, Baroness Soria d'Arançay died, leaving a little daughter. Baron Soria asked his wife's eldest sister, the Countess de Creil, for whom he had the greatest respect, if she would not take little Christiane to live with her.

"I could bring up a boy better than you could," he said, "but a girl alarms me. I could never make a *grande dame* of her and, to my way of thinking, a *grande dame* is perfection."

The Count and Countess de Creil had no children of their own and, very willingly, undertook to bring up their little niece.

Baron Soria sold his house in the Faubourg St. Honoré and only took a bachelor's flat in Paris. Then, as though the love of the soil, inherent in his race, had suddenly awakened within him, he bought a large estate near Sèvres, which he converted into a model farm and a wonderful rose plantation. This country place became a sort of open-air nursery for little Christiane.

Although he had confided his daughter to the Countess de Creil, Monsieur Soria took a lively interest in her education. Every day, in all weathers, the child was taken to "La Rosette," as the estate was named.

Her old nurse was installed there with her family. Christiane was immediately dressed in simple garments, thick or thin, according to the weather, and then, with strong shoes on her feet, allowed to have full liberty. As Baron Soria took a daily walk to the farm, he conducted Christiane back with him to Paris. Sometimes he spent the whole afternoon with her. Whilst grafting and pruning his rose-trees, he talked to her of Brazil, or of his various travels, and taught her a quantity of things. The child simply adored her father. She understood and liked his strength. When he put his arm round her and drew her to him, she used to tell him that she felt as though his arm was round her for the rest of the day.

If Christiane had been brought up in a convent, or amid very severe surroundings, with her refined and nervous temperament and her mind brimful of sentiment, she would have become either a mystic or mentally unhinged. The country life saved her from this. It was a moral and physical tonic for her, and she inhaled life and health through all her pores.

At the age of eighteen, Mademoiselle Soria d'Arançay made her first appearance in society and the event created quite a sensation. All who approached her felt her charm and her superiority.

The Duke de Blanzac, the wealthiest and most influential man of the Faubourg, and a *grand seigneur* in the full acceptation of the term, fell hopelessly in love with her. The first time he saw her cross the room he was fascinated by her and he watched her every movement. When he realised that he was in love with her he could scarcely believe his own heart. He was forty-five and thought he had finished with sentiment. He proposed and, to the great surprise of Christiane's friends and relatives, she accepted. The reason was that the Duke had won her heart as a child. She had often admired his fine horsemanship and his dignified bearing. Later on, she thought him far superior to the younger men. His manners were so courtly, and then, too, he was so refined. Baron Soria raised some objection, on account of the disparity of age, but it was all in vain, as Christiane declared that he was the only man she could care for and the only one who inspired her with respect. She was ambitious and liked power, so that, before anything else, she wanted as high a position, in fact, as it was possible for her to have. She felt that she had been created for this. Her marriage with the Duke placed her in the highest rank, the rank that her mother's family had occupied, and this gave her immense satisfaction.

The marriage was a very happy one. The Duchess de Blanzac was able to lead the brilliant existence for which she had always longed. She was a great social success and had joy of every kind,—except that of motherhood. She was greatly flattered and courted,

but no man succeeded in disturbing the equanimity of her life. Monsieur de Blanzac neglected nothing that might serve to help him in keeping his own prestige, and "handsome Jean," even when married, won the day over all his rivals. His wife's faithfulness was certainly his greatest triumph.

Christiane would probably have discovered, ultimately, the shallowness of her husband's mind and, when once she had awakened to this, her love might have ceased. They were both of them spared such a calamity, as the Duke died after six years of marriage. The memory of him, and her deep and sincere grief, influenced Christiane's after-life. As her husband had no direct heir, he left his wife the full control and use of all his wealth. If she should marry again, the title and fortune would revert to Count Louis de Challans, a distant cousin, who was very poor and, at that time, a sub-lieutenant in an artillery regiment. If the Duchess remained a widow, she was to take the rank of Dowager Duchess at the age of forty-five and put the heir indicated into possession. The said heir was then to pay her an annual income of a hundred thousand francs. If the Count de Challans were to commit any dishonourable deed, and so render himself unworthy of bearing the Blanzac name, the Duchess had the right and the power to disinherit him, in favour of any of the other cousins she should think most worthy. It was not considered likely, however, that such a contingency would arise.

Christiane considered this will the most flattering proof of esteem she had ever had, and she had felt a private satisfaction at the thought that she was capable of justifying her husband's confidence in her.

Providence took away from the Duchess, one after

another, those who loved her best and who were the dearest to her. Only a few months after her husband's death, she lost her father and then her aunt de Creil. All this meant absolute desolation to her, as, at the age of twenty-five, she found herself alone in the world, without any near ties, and burdened with all the responsibilities of high rank and a huge fortune.

She placed herself under the protection of her uncle, the Count de Creïl. There was a detached house at the end of her own garden. She had this fitted up for him, so that he might feel quite at home and that she should know he was quite near to her. He was a distinguished writer and his historical and literary articles were published in the best reviews. Besides this, he had a certain authority in his quality of nobleman and perfect gentleman, so that no one could have been better qualified to act as her guide and protector. She had been more or less his pupil, for it was he who had directed her studies and turned her thoughts, as it were, towards the light.

After her marriage, he had naturally lost some of his influence with her and he had very much feared that social life might make her less broad-minded, so that he could not help feeling a certain joy when she came under his care once more.

The grief which Christiane felt after her successive losses did not fail to react on her physically. Anæmia began its work of destruction, bringing in its train sleeplessness, languidness, a distaste for everything, and morbid thoughts. Her large, blue eyes shone with sleeplessness, her lips lost their colour, and it seemed to be a great effort to her to move about. The Count de Creil was very much concerned at the change in

her, and one of his friends, Dr. Moreau, who often saw her at her uncle's house, was still more concerned.

As a rule, priests and doctors know people least. The former only trouble about their souls and the latter about their bodies, and this incomplete vision makes them powerless to do their charges good or to cure them. Dr. Moreau was an exception to this rule. He did not make use of his science for earning money, but for studying the human being, about whom he felt an intense curiosity. He would have thought it quite beneath him to go to his patients just for money and to feel their pulses, look at their tongues, and hurry away without taking time to study them. He spent whole nights, sometimes at the bedside of patients whose lives and souls he had studied. He worked for their minds quite as much as for their bodies, and he made use of all the springs, such as religion, faith, love, or imagination, which might help to set the machinery in order once more. He would spare no trouble, in order to procure for one of his patients some joy that he considered necessary for counterbalancing some worry that was gnawing at the heart. Most of his own fortune was spent in experiments of this kind. His colleagues looked upon him as a poet, a dreamer, and a Utopian, but they frequently had recourse to him in difficult cases, and they owned that his diagnoses were infallible.

Dr. Moreau did not care much for society women. Their ignorance and futility annoyed him, their extraordinary aches and pains always made him feel distrustful, and their lack of sincerity exasperated him. The Duchess de Blanzac was, perhaps, the only one who had ever interested him. He had even chosen her as a subject for study. He liked to talk to her

and to argue with her. She was just the woman he had always needed to help him to carry out his humanitarian schemes. He longed to make use of her faculties for the benefit of the unfortunates. He knew that she gave away large sums of money, but he saw that her charity gave her no satisfaction, except the feeling of having accomplished a duty. He wanted her to have something better than this. He was the first to notice the change in Christiane and he watched, with ever-increasing anxiety, the various phases of the crisis through which she was passing. From a feeling of delicacy, he had abstained from offering any advice. He began to fear, though, that she might have recourse to narcotics for her sleeplessness, or that she might even try morphia. He therefore decided to speak to her and, just at this juncture, she sent for him.

After writing out a prescription and giving instructions about her diet, he entered, courageously, into what was really the province of the confessor. In a gentle, discreet way, he probed to the very soul of his patient. He then did the best he could towards healing it, not with commonplace words, but with sincere sympathy and a sort of paternal tenderness that was infinitely sweet to the sick woman. He then showed her the necessity of rising above her grief, of coming out of herself, of working for the welfare of her fellow-creatures, of doing the kind of good which, in its turn, would help forward other good work. He showed her the humanitarian aspect of true charity, and this aspect could not fail to appeal to the mind of Christiane. She began to discover all kinds of charitable works to undertake, plans to elaborate, and a whole edifice to construct. She soon entered so

thoroughly into the doctor's schemes, that she told him she was quite ready to work with him.

She began at once, and the new interest revived her in the most miraculous manner. She went to the rescue of several artists, she provided the means for some workers to take the holiday of which they were sorely in need, and she gave marriage portions to several girls. Five families owed their existence to her and when, one day, Dr. Moreau brought her triumphantly a magnificent specimen of humanity, in the form of the baby of a young couple whom she had helped to marry, her woman's heart had been stirred to its very depths.

In spite of her youthfulness, Christiane could maintain the dignity of her rank, in a way that put her above all criticism. She managed to conquer for herself absolute freedom, and to get all the privileges accorded to dowagers. People spoke of her as "the Duchess" just as they would have said "the Queen." She was consulted about all kinds of things, and even those who did not care much for her could not help acknowledging her superiority.

Christiane kept up the Château de Blanzac in the same style as during her husband's lifetime. She managed her household admirably, having people around her who could second her and dismissing pitilessly the useless ones.

After three years of retirement she went back into the world and, both in Paris and in her country house, she fulfilled conscientiously all her social duties. She gave all kinds of entertainments, thus providing work for numbers of people. The organisation of her balls and dinners interested her immensely. It was a way of exercising her power, her imagination, and her taste.

In the midst of her large social circle, the Duchess de Blanzac had created for herself an inner circle of tried friends, of intelligent and agreeable men, whose chivalrous and almost loving friendship was very pleasant to her, for she delighted in being loved. She was at home to these chosen few, whom she styled her "faithful friends," every day, from two to four, but she was not at home to any one else. She received them in the room where she usually sat. This red drawing-room was at the end of the ground floor suite of rooms. Its dimensions and severe decoration suited her face and figure. The Dutch pictures, the piano, the books, the huge plants gave it a very cosy aspect, so that every one felt at home there. The two hours' conversation with congenial spirits was a daily treat for Christiane, and it enabled her to forget, more easily, all the commonplace conversation she was obliged to hear at other times.

Although she had a few devoted friends, and a fair number of admirers, she also had her enemies. It was very difficult for her to put up with stupidity and affectation, and she could not always conceal her antipathy and her disdain.

Some people accused her of holding theories which they termed "modern" and she was blamed for allowing herself to be guided by Dr. Moreau. Such people thought, no doubt, that a Jesuit would have been a more suitable adviser.

Christiane was keenly sensitive to all the poetry of Catholicism. She loved the liturgical chanting, the mystery of the tabernacle, and the religious ceremonies. She never lingered long, however, over the dogmas, and always turned her thoughts resolutely away from them. She performed the duties imposed by the

Church, more for the sake of being in communion with her own people than from any real faith. The church-goers owed her a grudge for her lack of zeal in so-called religious matters, and they could scarcely believe it possible that, with such lukewarm piety, she should remain morally irreproachable.

Although Christiane did not usually care for foreigners, she had been attracted by Madame de Keradieu, and the two women had become rather intimate.

On returning to Paris, in March, she heard of the arrival of Madame de Keradieu's relatives and asked to have them introduced to her. She did not care for Clara at all, but she thought Annie attractive and liked her.

Christiane was not sorry to obtain some influence over the wealthy heiress and she invited the two cousins to luncheon several times. She then asked them to a quiet dinner, at which there were only to be sixteen guests, and this was to be followed by a reception.

The evening before the dinner, Christiane received a line from the Duke d'Ormeuse, saying that he could not be present. On looking down her visiting list, for some one to take his place, she came to the name of the Marchioness d'Anguilhon.

"What a pity her son is away," she said to herself, "he would have done very well."

At the very moment when this idea crossed her mind, Jacques was leaving his rooms to come and call on her.

CHAPTER VII

The Marquis d'Anguilhon and Madame de Blanzac were very old friends. They had always known each other. They had taken their first communion on the same day at the Church of St. Clotilde. They had gone to the same dancing class and had met at all the children's parties of the Faubourg. At the age of fourteen, Jacques was in love with Christiane, and it was thanks to this little love affair that he had experienced the first pangs of jealousy and known the joy of loving. He had gravely declared to the Abbé, who gave him lessons, that he would never marry any one but Mademoiselle Soria.

As Christiane was the same age as Jacques she, of course, soon went ahead of him and, as they grew older, he could only admire her from afar. He was greatly occupied with his studies and had just taken his bachelor's degree when she married. He was present at the wedding, but his heart was full of rage and sorrowful anger. He would have drawn down upon the head of "handsome Jean" anything but blessings, and he had not dared trust himself to go into the vestry and offer his congratulations to the bride and bridegroom.

Later on, Jacques fell in love with a well-known Russian lady, who was divorced from her husband,

and his *liaison* with her kept him rather aloof from the rest of the world. Then came the death of his father and his own financial ruin. Christiane, on her side, had had sorrow after sorrow, and they had met very rarely during all this time.

When the Duchess de Blanzac began to receive again, she welcomed Jacques to her house as an old friend, and all the more cordially as he was not happy. Each season, she invited him to Blanzac for the shooting and, in Paris, he came to all her entertainments. Beside this, she often went to see his mother, sent her flowers and fruit, and paid her all kinds of charming little attentions.

Jacques went frequently to call on the Duchess, between two and four. Her wit entertained him and her elegance, her voice, and her manners charmed him so thoroughly, that he felt quite happy when with her. A glance from her blue eyes, a clasp of her hand, in which she knew how to put so much real friendship, soothed his irritation and chased away his discontent.

Although Christiane was exactly his own age, he always looked upon her as older, and he even felt as though she belonged to another generation. This impression, probably due to the fact that she had married early, gave a shade of reverence to his liking for her.

All this should have made it more easy for him to carry out Madame de Lène's wishes. It was excessively painful to him to broach the subject of his wish to marry the American heiress to Christiane, and the idea of asking her to help him was still more painful. He had a sort of intuition that she would not like it.

He walked slowly towards the Rue de Varenne, his

eyes fixed on the ground and his heart full of anguish. The town house of the Anguilhons, at present rented to strangers, stood next to the Duchess de Blanzac's. The gates were open, and Jacques looked inside. The courtyard was badly kept and had a dreary, deserted aspect. This gave him a shock. He drew himself up with a resolute air, and it was with a firmer tread that he entered the house of the Duchess de Blanzac.

When Christiane caught sight of him, she uttered an exclamation of delight, advanced to meet him, and held out her hand.

"Is it really you!" she said as Jacques kissed her hand. "Well, it is simply Providence who sent you."

"I only wish it were," answered the young man, smiling.

"I was regretting your absence only five minutes ago."

"To what do I owe that honour?"

"You shall know soon. Sit down."

The Duchess pointed to a chair for her visitor and sat down herself on her little sofa, with its cushions of soft coloured silks.

"Have you just come straight from Algeria?" she asked.

"No, I stayed a few days at Cannes."

"When did you get here?"

"On Saturday evening."

"How odd! I was thinking of you on Sunday, in church. Your mother was there at the one o'clock Mass. She very rarely comes at that hour. She was praying so fervently that I envied her, and I said to myself that she must be praying for you."

The expression of Jacques' face softened suddenly.

"For me? Oh, yes, it probably was for me. I must

be pretty well known up above. I am quite sure that mother would like to die, if she felt sure that, when once she was with God, she could obtain more happiness for her son."

"Poor woman!" said Christiane gently. "I do hope, for her sake, that you are not thinking of starting off again immediately?"

The Marquis wisely seized the opportunity this presented to him.

"That depends entirely on you," he said.

"On me?" exclaimed Christiane. "Well, then, you can unpack your trunk at once, for I very much dislike seeing gaps in my circle of friends. What can I do to keep you here?"

Jacques was somewhat disconcerted by the large blue eyes that were fixed on him questioningly.

"Come, explain," said Christiane.

"I am thinking of marrying."

"Ah, and you want me to help you?"

Jacques nodded, without saying a word.

"I hope you are not going to ask me to introduce you to the famous heiress?" said the Duchess laughing.

"I am, though."

"Ah, no, not that!"

These words literally escaped Christiane's lips. She heard them herself distinctly, just as though another person had uttered them. She was ashamed of her vehemence and the colour came into her cheeks.

"No, not that," she repeated more gently. "It is impossible. Ever since people have discovered that I see a great deal of Miss Villars, I hear of nothing but her. Ten persons—you hear—ten have already been to ask me to propose either a son, a brother, or a friend to her. I have refused. In the first place,

one does not propose a husband to an American girl, as one would for a French girl, especially when the American girl has declared, categorically, that she will not marry in Europe, as this one has done. Whoever has put this idea into your mind?"

"My lawyer, Bontemps. I took his advice and went to the Opera, last night, to see Miss Villars. I watched her through my glasses for more than an hour and, quite independently of her money, I quite like her."

"Really?" said Christiane, with a touch of irony in her voice.

"Yes, really," repeated Jacques.

"Well, if it is not for her fortune, I doubt very much whether she could make you happy. She is intelligent, well-bred, but—your two natures are so different——"

"One could not be very unhappy with an intelligent, well-bred wife. Contrasts often produce the deepest affection."

"The strongest passions, you mean. According to my way of thinking, a certain affinity is necessary for married life, and, to be quite frank, I do not think there would be much between you and Miss Villars. You are always up in the air, and she is very much down here. However, an heiress worth sixty million francs cannot be discussed," said the Duchess in conclusion, in rather a hard way.

Jacques coloured slightly, but answered with dignity.

"You know my position," he said. "If I am to restore our fallen house, I must marry a very rich wife. There is a lack of grandeur in the means employed, I grant, but there is no choice."

"Oh, I am not blaming you," said Madame de Blanzac, promptly. "If it were a question of a

French girl, I would help you, willingly, but in the case of Miss Villars, my intervention would do no good. It would do harm, even. The only thing is to make her care for you. I can give you an opportunity for beginning to pay attention to her. The day after to-morrow, I am having a little dinner-party and a reception afterwards. I thought you were still away, or I should have invited you. The Duke d'Ormeuse cannot come at the last minute. You must come instead of him. For these informal dinners, I like to choose my guests. The Keradieus are coming and Miss Villars and her cousin. You will make her acquaintance and, after that, you will not need me, I imagine."

"On the contrary, I shall need the advice of an intelligent woman with keen perception. In an affair of this kind, it is absolutely necessary. It is quite different making love to an American girl. If I am left to myself, I shall make all kinds of mistakes. I am so convinced of what I say, that, if you desert me, I shall give up my scheme."

"But it would be a great responsibility for me," urged Christiane, gravely.

"Yes, perhaps it would," replied Jacques, thoughtfully. "As a matter of fact, I had not realised how much I was asking you. Forgive me, I have no right to ask such a thing."

"Ah, it is not nice of you to say that!" exclaimed Christiane. "Our old friendship warranted your consulting me. I should have been hurt, if you had gone to any one else. I am hesitating about helping in this marriage, because it seems an impossible one to me and I fear that you may have a refusal, which would be humiliating. However, in order to prove to you

my willingness to help you, I will think the matter over, as lawyers say. If not——"

"If not, you leave me to my bad luck. So be it."

"And now," said Christiane, "tell me about Algeria. Did you enjoy yourself while you were there?"

"Enjoy is not exactly the word. I had a great deal of real pleasure though."

Just as Jacques had said this, the Viscount de Nozay and the Prince de Nolles arrived. They shook hands, told each other various scraps of news, and then the conversation turned naturally on Algeria, and after that on other subjects.

When Jacques left, Christiane said to him:

"Come to-morrow, a little before two, and I will give you my answer."

The precarious situation of the Marquis d'Anguilhon was a subject of anxiety to Christiane. She had noticed that people were beginning to forget him, and that he himself went abroad more and more. It had frequently occurred to her that a wealthy marriage might save him, and she had often said to herself that she would urge this on him. She did not, however, like the idea of his marrying Miss Villars. The thought of it caused her a sort of vague sorrow, which she put down to disappointment in him. The girl was a foreigner and too rich for any one very poor. It seemed to her that both those considerations ought to have weighed with Jacques. She then said to herself that she was expecting too much and that God had not, perhaps, yet created the man who could resist the temptation of sixty millions. This figure represented a great force, a force that she herself would rather like to have in her hands. For the Marquis d'Anguilhon it meant happiness and triumph. The

question was, had he any chance of success? She remembered all that Madame de Keradieu had told her about the Villars family, their position and their Protestantism. She thought over the various conversations she had had with Annie, she thought of her independent character and of her indifference about the social distinctions of the Old World. Knowing full well that she could aspire to some of the highest titles, the young girl did not care about any of them. She seemed to be enjoying herself in Paris, but she was essentially American and would not easily be induced to give up her country. Was she likely to fall in love with any one? Christiane thought of her cold and childlike expression and was inclined to think that she was incapable of falling in love. No, she could never have dreamed of a Prince Charming, nor yet have made for herself an ideal. If she ever were to fall in love, though, she would not stop at anything. The resolute expression of her mouth showed that she had a strong will. Would Jacques' refinement, his distinction, and his perfect manners make any impression on her? One minute, Christiane thought they might, and the next that they would not. Her vision, which was usually so clear and so rapid, was now strangely confused. Then, too, she felt a strong repugnance to helping in this marriage. She would be accused of inviting Miss Villars for the sake of persuading her to marry the Marquis d'Anguilhon, and this idea was extremely disagreeable. As Jacques had declared, though, that he would give up his scheme if she would not help him, she felt, in a certain measure, obliged to do what she could, and this annoyed her.

As she lay resting on the sofa in her dressing-room, as she usually did for a time after her visitors had

gone and after she had been out, she was thinking it all over again and was annoyed with herself for her indecision. Just at this moment, a servant came to ask if Madame de Lène might see her. She gave orders for the visitor to be shown in, and in a short time Madame de Lène appeared.

She was a woman of about sixty years of age, and rather distinguished-looking. Her face was framed by side curls of white hair, and lighted up by her keen, intelligent little eyes. There was a kind-hearted, good-natured look about her. She gave Madame de Blanzac a detailed account of some business transaction and then said to her, abruptly:

"The Marquis d'Anguilhon has been to see you this afternoon, has he not?"

"How do you know?" asked the Duchess, surprised.

"I sent him,—indirectly, of course, for I have never spoken to him."

"Ah, then this idea of his marrying Miss Villars comes from you? I might have thought of that," said the Duchess, getting up quickly. "You might, at least, have consulted me first," she added with an expression of annoyance. "In the first place, what do you know of this American girl?"

"Not much, except that she says she will not marry a Frenchman."

Christiane had taken a seat in front of her dressing-table and she was now combing her hair nervously. She stopped short, thinking Madame de Lène was joking, and the expression in her eyes at that moment was by no means encouraging.

"And as people nearly always do what they do not wish to," continued Madame de Lène, calmly, "it occurred to me that if some one very attractive were

to take it into his head to make her like him, he might succeed."

The originality of this argument completely disarmed Madame de Blanzac.

"You are very philosophical," she said, smiling.

"My experience of life has not been lost on me; that is all."

"And in your wisdom, you have come to the conclusion that Monsieur d'Anguilhon is the 'some one' who might fascinate Miss Villars?"

"I am sure of it. He has all the qualities necessary. When he was a child, I often met him out on his walks with the Abbé who was his tutor. He interested me then, and I used to turn round to watch him. He looked like a little prince in those days, and at present he looks like a *grand seigneur.*"

"Yes, he does," said Christiane, with a fixed gaze in her eyes, as though she had a mental vision of Jacques' face.

"I flatter myself that my idea is a happy one."

"And how much do you want for the idea?"

"Twenty-five thousand francs."

"The price of a surgical operation," said the Duchess, laughing.

"Yes," answered Madame de Lène, "and the operation will cure Monsieur d'Anguilhon of his poverty and prevent him from going out to die in Africa."

"To die in Africa? What do you mean?"

"Do you not know that he has volunteered to take part in an exploring expedition?"

"He has not told me a word about that."

"Well, it is a plan he has been thinking of for some time, and he was just about to carry it out. He wanted to put his affairs in order before starting,

and to pay his debts. He needed a large sum of money and I offered to find it for him, provided that he proposed to Miss Villars and that you would help him."

"Oh, if that is how matters stand, you were quite right," said Christiane, impetuously. "His mother would be fearfully unhappy without him. There is only one thing I fear, and that is that you have put him on one of those wrong tracks, which are constantly to be found in life and which only lead us on to disappointments."

"Well, if it should be so, Africa will console him. He was very enthusiastic about that scheme, and Bontemps assured me that he had the greatest difficulty to persuade him to give it up, for the present, at any rate. However, it may turn out I have acted for the best, and more in his interest than in my own. I hope you are not vexed with me for giving you this opportunity of doing a good deed."

"No—but for the future, I should prefer your asking my consent first. At present, I am obliged to do something which I do not want to do."

After Madame de Lène's departure, Christiane sat for a long time with her eyes fixed on her looking-glass, but her gaze was turned inwards. She was thinking over what she had just heard. She felt sure that Jacques had thought of going to Africa in the hope that he might meet with a death that would be to his honour out there, and so escape from the petty worries of his present existence. There was nothing surprising in all that. She then thought of the Marchioness d'Anguilhon, as she had seen her on Sunday in church, with her emaciated face, her expressive eyes, and her hands clasped together in prayer. She

knew, no doubt, of her son's plan and she was praying God to prevent him from carrying it out. An immense pity took possession of Christiane's soul, and this pity conquered her repugnance and her scruples. She, too, began to wish for this marriage, which might be the means of saving Jacques, and she decided that she would do her utmost to bring it about. She would give him opportunities of meeting Miss Villars and she would praise his good qualities to her and let her see how much she herself respected him. She began to think that Madame de Lène was quite right and that he would be very likely to inspire a girl with love for him. And then, as even the best natures have their weak points, the idea amused her that Annie might, after all, fall in love with a Frenchman and marry him, in spite of every one and everything. She revelled beforehand, in a mischievous way, at the thought of the conflict of sentiments which such a marriage would cause, and the idea of Clara's anger positively delighted her.

Christiane lay awake most of the night, thinking over this romance that was to be worked out. She studied the characters of those who were to take part in it, elaborated a plan of action, traced out her own rôle, and the following day, when Jacques appeared, she said to him, as she held out her hand:

"I will help you."

"Really!" he exclaimed, with a thrill of joy and hope. "Will you really help me? Oh, then, it means victory. You think I am likely to succeed?"

"Yes, but we must not go too fast. In the first place, you must promise to obey me blindly."

"Blindly. I am only too happy that you consent to guide me."

"People always say that and then, frequently, only follow the advice that they like. I have a great deal of self-respect, as you know, and, as I am interested myself in your cause, I want you to win. You must let me guide you in *everything*."

"I promise faithfully and, all the more so, as I have already had one experience, with a certain Miss Ellis. My affair with her would make the subject of a one-act comedy, which might be entitled, 'A Mutual Misunderstanding.'"

"Ah, when misunderstandings take place with American women, nothing more can be done, for they are very sensitive and vindictive. I know them well enough to be able to call out: 'Danger!' if it should be necessary."

"What did you mean, yesterday, when you said that 'I am always up in the air and that Miss Villars is very much down here'?"

"Ah, I see that my words have been running in your head," said Christiane, smiling. "I do not quite know how to express what I mean. The ideal is above and beyond life, heroism is beyond courage, fanaticism is beyond religion, and perversity is beyond evil. Well, as a rule, for there are, of course, exceptions, American women never arrive at the *beyond*. They are *within* the circle that limits our sphere of action, that borders on the ideal, whilst we are *beyond* it. If they heard me saying this, they would protest energetically, and declare that they have more culture than we have. That is quite possible and I even grant that it is so. And yet, a little, ignorant European girl, brought up within the walls of a convent, will have impulses and transports of feeling which their doctoresses are incapable of experiencing. The souls of our European

girls will soar to heights, and penetrate to depths, which the others could never reach with all their science. Take Madame de Keradieu, for instance, who has lived for years in France. She is much more intelligent and better informed than many of my acquaintances. There are numbers of subjects, nevertheless, which I could never discuss with her. When we touch on the domain of abstract thought, she cannot follow, and this considerably limits the field of conversation."

"And so you think that the 'beyond' and the 'down here' would clash?" asked Jacques, with evident dread.

"Clash? No. Miss Villars has some excellent qualities. You might be happy with her, if you were wise enough not to ask her for more than she can give."

"Well, tell me frankly, do you like her?"

"Yes, otherwise I should not invite her. I should think her delightful, if she were only less decided in her manner and if she were not quite so hard. You see it is the inner life that gives softness and delicacy to the expression of the face. The American woman does not know what repose means. Her face, untouched by flashes of thought or reverie, has the crude light and the hard outlines of those beautiful Southern landscapes, the atmosphere of which is crossed by the mistral. In a word, she lacks that indefinable attraction which we call 'charm.' Miss Villars is no exception to the rule."

"Do you think my mother would like her?" asked Jacques, somewhat disconcerted by what he had just heard.

Christiane reflected for a few seconds.

"Yes," she said, at last. "It would be as well to warn Madame d'Anguilhon that American girls are not timid, naïve creatures. In fact, they are not at all naïve. They all seem to me like married women."

"Like married women?"

"Yes, that something which makes of the real girl, a being apart, an exquisite creature, is lacking in them. By their look of assurance, and by a thousand other signs, one guesses that they are aware of everything, and Madame de Keradieu tells me that such is the case. When once they are out, the initiated ones speak very openly before them, in order to put them on their guard, probably. Of course, as they are given full liberty, it is as well to open their eyes."

"And does Miss Villars seem to you like a married woman?" asked Jacques, with such a scared look on his face that the Duchess laughed.

"Yes, she does. Do not let that disturb your mind, though. If she is not naïve, Annie Villars is very *comme il faut*."

"Annie," repeated the Marquis, "I like the name; it is simple and has a soft sound."

"Yes, it is a pretty name," agreed Madame de Blanzac.

"And what sort of a woman is the mother?"

"A very good sort, quite inoffensive, and without a shadow of authority. You have nothing to fear there. Beware of the cousin, though. She will be the enemy and a very wily one too. If she had the slightest idea of your intentions, she would be capable of hastening their departure for England. The two cousins want to be there for the London season. You have just six weeks for the conquest of the young person."

"Not very long."

"Quite enough, for if she does not care for you at once, she will never care for you."

"Ah, love at first sight would be too much to expect."

"Love at first sight is not necessary, but you must make a good impression on her the first time she sees you. If you do not, you will fare like the Duke de Randan. He is just as far advanced now, as the first day he met her."

"By the way, does she speak French?"

"With a slight accent, but fluently."

"Heaven be praised. It would be terrible to have to make love in English."

"It is certainly better to fight with one's own weapons, and on one's own ground. Now, listen to my instructions."

"I am all ears."

"You are coming to dinner to-morrow; that is understood. You will take the Viscountess de Fresne in; she is very entertaining and likes to monopolise her companion. You must allow yourself to be entertained and monopolised. Miss Villars will be on the other side of the table, but a little higher up, so that if she should be tempted to look at you, she will have to turn her head slightly. After dinner, we shall have music and songs and then an orchestra and dancing until supper-time. You must keep to the French group and you must not ask Miss Villars to dance with you. If the Keradieus want to introduce you to her, try to find some excuse for postponing the introduction. She will probably be surrounded with admirers, so that your indifference will attract her attention, even if your own personality has not already done so. That

is very improbable, though," added the Duchess, with a mocking smile.

"Quite improbable," repeated Jacques, imperturbably.

"When you do make her acquaintance, do not pay her any special attention, and no compliments, remember. Behave just as though you were with a French girl. I have noticed that American girls are always flattered by that. Take rather an authoritative tone when you are talking to her. You might, in fact, simply be yourself then, as your own character will serve you admirably. As you already like her, there is no need to pretend, and there is a great force in sincerity. Do not be in any hurry, as that would spoil everything. Keep me very well posted and I will observe Miss Villars and question Madame de Keradieu in such a way that she will suspect nothing. I shall then be better able to guide you."

"What a clever politician you are," said Jacques, looking at Christiane, admiringly.

"Yes, I always envied the women of the Fronde. A good conspiracy would have suited me."

"And been more interesting than the marriage of a poverty-stricken man."

"Not when the poverty-stricken man is a friend of my childhood, and when it is a question of preventing him from going out to get himself killed in Africa."

"How did you know I was going to Africa?" asked Jacques, flushing to the roots of his hair.

"No matter how, but I do know. The only son of a widow has no right to take his life into his own hands like that, Monsieur d'Anguilhon," added the Duchess, in a severe tone.

"Unless he is of no use."

"Of no use? Your presence is much more necessary to your mother than luxury and even comfort. In your case, there would be more heroism in staying at home and putting up with limited means than in going out to brave death in Africa."

"Perhaps so, but such heroism as that is beyond my strength."

"Men are only capable of the sacrifices that are the most painful ones to other people. That is a well-known fact. I hope there will be no need for you to do the bad thing you were intending to do and that you will marry Miss Villars. We must have a grand wedding at St. Clotilde's."

"So be it," said Jacques, gaily. "If it is to be, it will be, and if not, I shall only feel a trifle ashamed."

"Are you a fatalist?"

"An absolute fatalist."

"Then what are you and I doing now?"

"We are doing just what is necessary for the success or failure of this affair."

"So, according to you, it would have been impossible for me to have refused to help you?"

"Impossible, since you did not refuse."

"Then I have no responsibility?"

"None."

"And no merit then, either?"

"The merit of being a good and beneficent instrument, just as the rose has the merit of being a beautiful, sweet-scented flower. Our brains are nothing but phonographs, upon which our respective rôles are inscribed. We live out these rôles, and that is what gives us the illusion of free-will. If this were not so, we should govern the world, whereas we are governed ourselves. It is impossible to doubt that."

"Oh, please do not talk like that," exclaimed Christiane, "you are upsetting everything—everything. Who would have imagined that you ever thought of such questions?"

"Circumstances have obliged me to think."

"Well, I must say that I cannot congratulate you on the result of your meditations. I hope you have not talked to your mother like this?"

"Heaven forbid! I would not say a word to her that might shake her faith."

"Why are you not as scrupulous about shaking mine?"

"Yours?" said Jacques, looking into Christiane's eyes. "Yours?" he repeated; "I do not think you have any."

The Duchess lowered her eyelids with the long lashes promptly.

"You are too young to be my father confessor," she said laughing. "Let us leave philosophy alone. Go and think about Miss Villars and how you are to win her. You must succeed, for the sake of the honour of the Old World."

"I will try."

Madame de Blanzac watched the Marquis as he went away and a smile played over her lips.

"We shall see," she said to herself, "whether our little Yankee will prove as refractory as she believes herself to be!"

CHAPTER VIII

New York, Boston, and Philadelphia are nearer to Paris than most of the provincial towns of France. Like most Americans, Annie Villars and her cousin knew the names of French savants, literary men, and artists and they were soon well up in what was going on in Paris. Madame de Keradieu took them to the various picture exhibitions, charity bazaars, important weddings, and also to the Opera and the Bois, and she always pointed out any noted persons to them.

Annie and Clara had, of course, begged to be taken to the smaller theatres and to the little restaurants to supper, but Madame de Keradieu assured them that her husband would never consent to escort them there.

The American woman is a sufficiently good republican not to wish for royalty in her own country, but she is delighted that it exists in Europe, and she will go to any trouble to obtain the privilege of being allowed to make her curtsy to it.

In the same way, she is virtuous enough not to wish to meet with the devil when she is at home, but she is charmed to meet him elsewhere. When she is in Paris, she never fails to go in search of him; in the first place just to see what he is like, but more particularly in order to be able to say that she has seen him—and she never finds him as black as she

had hoped. She buys the most daring of novels and she likes to go to the most risky of plays, and it usually happens that she neither understands the novel nor the play.

When at the theatre, or driving in the Bois, she always likes to have the celebrities of the *demi-monde* pointed out, and she examines them with the keenest curiosity, because they are "wicked," but she does not realise all the ignominy of their lives. All such things would leave their trace for ever on the soul of a French girl, but they merely amuse an American girl. She is not sensual and she is as incapable of comprehending depravity as she is of comprehending holiness.

Annie Villars and her cousin had no reason to regret having followed Madame de Keradieu's advice, for their season in Paris was most enjoyable. Their relationship with the Baroness and their own personality gave them a certain position at once. At afternoon receptions, they were very much admired, so that the card basket in their drawing-room already contained a number of cards, bearing aristocratic names, and, curiously enough, these little pieces of cardboard had more effect on Annie than the individuals they represented. She would look at them and handle them with a certain pleasure. The words Prince de Nolles and Duke de Randan seemed to mean more than such names as Mr. Jones or Mr. Smith. She was rather ashamed that she should have this impression and she would not, on any account, have owned to it to her cousin.

The amount of her dowry had, of course, excited certain ambitious families. Madame de Keradieu had taken the precaution to let every one know that Annie

did not intend to marry in Europe, and that she was by no means anxious to have a title. Several young men had, nevertheless, obtained an introduction and, in accordance with French manners and customs, they had requested their family or friends to work for them.

Duke Albert de Randan was openly posing as a suitor. He was a good-looking young man of twenty-seven years of age, with an old name and a certain fortune. He thought that, with these advantages, he would easily win the American girl. His attentions and his proposal flattered Annie's vanity, but he made no impression whatever on her. The Faubourg St. Germain society excited her curiosity just as Japanese or Chinese society would have done. She studied the women's dresses, their way of receiving, and the arrangement of their drawing-rooms. All that amused her, but she felt that there was nothing in common between her and the people she met. She was absolutely nonplussed by the girls and she never managed to carry on a conversation with them. She finally came to the conclusion that vanity alone could make American women anxious to enter into this world, as it was by no means amusing and there was nothing which could appeal to them, as their tastes and their education were so totally different.

Baron de Keradieu's friends were most friendly with the two girls and Viscount Guy de Nozay had promptly discovered Annie's natural wit.

Guy was of small stature and very plain, but his very plainness was of that kind which is singularly attractive. He was extremely original and had a vein of humour, which caused him to be held in awe. His keen eyes saw everything, so that only those who had nothing to hide could be at ease in his presence.

Annie's naturalness and sincerity had immediately charmed him and her remarks amused him. He delighted in attacking her American ideas and she defended them courageously. This little warfare, carried on with the most perfect courtesy and in a witty manner, amused Annie. Baron de Keradieu and Viscount de Nozay were the only two Frenchmen she cared for so far.

As a matter of fact, the important persons of the Faubourg St. Germain had caused her keen disappointment, a disappointment which is shared by most American women.

The Duchess de Blanzac was the only woman who had excited her admiration.

"She is a perfect queen," Annie had said, the first time she met her. There was something extraordinary about her, something which Annie had never met with in any other woman, and she could not take her eyes from her. She was extremely flattered by any attention shown to her by Christiane de Blanzac. Clara did not share her enthusiasm. She declared that the Duchess was not really as good as she seemed and that it would not do to have too much faith in her. The two cousins had several slight quarrels on this subject.

Annie was delighted when she received an invitation to a grand dinner to be given by the Duchess, followed by a soirée. She was glad of this opportunity of seeing how people of the highest rank entertained.

She took a great deal of trouble about her dress, as she wanted to be at her best. When the great day arrived, she was quite feverish with excitement, more excited than she had ever been under any circumstance in her life.

She wore a dress of very pale pink silk, made exquisitely and cut low in a most artistic manner. Her necklace was composed of seven rows of wonderful little pearls caught together with tiny bars set with diamonds.

"I have never seen you look as beautiful, Miss Annie," exclaimed Catherine, in delight. "I am quite certain that your Duchess will not have any one prettier and better dressed in her room to-night."

"You dear old goose," said Annie, laughing and kissing her old nurse, as she always did on days when she felt she had been very exacting. "Other people will not see me through your eyes, unfortunately."

"God bless you," said Catherine, putting the finishing touches to her young mistress's toilette.

Mrs. Villars had also been invited, in the most correct manner possible, but she had excused herself and had asked Madame de Keradieu to chaperon the two girls. As she was dining out, she drove first to the Rue Vaneau with Clara and Annie.

"I hope you will enjoy yourselves," she said, gaily, as she left them.

As the Keradieus' carriage was stopped several times by a block in the traffic, they were the last of the dinner guests to arrive at the Duchess de Blanzac's. On entering the brilliantly lighted house, Annie was seized with a fit of nervous shyness. She felt a flood of light over her and saw, in a confused way, red and gold liveries, plants, flowers, a suite of magnificent rooms and, in the furthest one, light dresses, white shirt fronts, and black coats. All eyes were turned towards her during the ceremony of the introductions and this confused her still more, so that she did not catch a single name nor distinguish a single face.

The Viscount de Nozay took her in to dinner and when once she was seated at table, between him and Monsieur de Keradieu, she came to herself again.

Jacques, too, was by no means tranquil in his mind. He was, apparently, paying great attention to the Viscountess de Fresne, but, in reality, not a single movement or expression of the young American girl escaped him. He saw her reply by a smile to a little friendly sign from the Duchess de Blanzac. He then watched her as she glanced round the table. When her eyes were fixed on him, he noticed that an expression of surprise came to her face. His heart began to beat more quickly and presently he felt that Annie's eyes were fixed on him again. It seemed as though she were unconsciously attracted, for several times during dinner he saw that she was watching him.

Jacques was sure that, for some reason or another, he had excited the girl's curiosity, for it certainly was curiosity that he read on her face. He was very much delighted and this delight was reflected in his eyes.

He began to examine Annie more carefully and he was charmed by her girlishness and the good-natured expression of her face. He thought her very *comme il faut* and the only fault he had to find was that she was not dressed quite simply enough for a young girl. The rings she was wearing rather horrified him. She had a turquoise on her little finger and a black pearl ring and a diamond one on the third finger. The sparkling of all these stones during dinner had rather the effect on him of a false note.

"She might be a married woman," he said to himself.

He then thought of her immense fortune and could

not help glancing again at the privileged creature whom Providence had so greatly favoured.

Although Annie had been rather perplexed by the Marquis d'Anguilhon and had looked at him several times, this had not prevented her from taking note of all that she saw. This French dinner interested her immensely.

Dinners are the special triumphs of American women. They vie with each other in inventing fresh things with which to surprise or amaze their guests, and, as a result of their various inventions, they have arrived at a luxury of which we have no idea, a luxury that is, perhaps, more remarkable than refined. In order to judge of American plutocracy, one must have been present at some of these feasts given by their millionaires. They are veritable orgies of light and colour. Silk cloths, sometimes even with gold fringes, the table strewn with rare flowers and dinner services of silver, delicate china, and cut glass. A profusion of the most carefully thought out dishes and the most exquisite fruits in the world. Then women who are pretty and remarkable looking, not elegant in themselves but dressed by the first houses, women who are perhaps wearing in their hair, or on their neck and arms, the gems of princely crowns or the jewels of queens now in exile. Added to all this, the most exuberant gaiety, which is kept up by abundant champagne and wine served indiscriminately.

Accustomed to magnificence of this kind, Annie was at first surprised, and a trifle disappointed, by the comparative simplicity of this dinner.

The dining-room, with its fine proportions, its ceiling, and its oak panelled walls, formed a somewhat severe and sombre background, against which the table

and the guests stood out in relief. The beautiful Flemish table-linen, the candelabras with their candles, the Louis XVI. centre-piece with its mirrors framed in silver holding a large basket, the admirably chased vases filled with roses of delicate colours, the dishes all prepared and served up artistically, the women with their quiet elegance, the animated conversation carried on in a distinctly well-bred way, all this made an ensemble, pleasing alike to the eye and to the ear, for all was so delightfully harmonious. Annie Villars did not fail to experience a sort of well being, a delectation. She felt that it was all very beautiful and very good, better than anything she had seen hitherto.

After dinner, Madame de Keradieu talked to Jacques for a few minutes and, when she joined Annie a few minutes later, the young girl asked her to whom she had been speaking.

"I do not remember his name, but I am quite sure I have met him somewhere," said Annie.

"Yes, and I have, too," added Clara.

"Impossible," said Madame de Keradieu, "for he has only just returned from Algeria and has not yet been to see us. He is a friend of Henri's, the Marquis d'Anguilhon."

"Ah, that's it," exclaimed Annie. "He is so exactly like a portrait, a copy of Van Dyck's, that we saw at Versailles. It is Joyeuse, Marquis d'Anguilhon, Seigneur de Blonay. Do you not remember it, Clara?"

"Yes, quite well. And you are right, too," she added, looking at Jacques, who was standing just under a brilliant light. "He is exactly like the portrait."

"The portrait is, no doubt, one of Jacques' ancestors," said the Viscount de Nozay.

"Henri is the living picture of a Keradieu who died about a hundred and fifty years ago," put in the Baroness.

"Yes, there are still a few authentic aristocrats," said Guy in a bantering tone, "in spite of what Miss May believes."

"But I never doubted that," answered Clara, laughing.

"No, really? Well, so much the better."

Annie examined Jacques more carefully.

"How curious it is though," she said, "to see a living person with exactly the same features and expression as a portrait painted two hundred years ago. What a pity that the Marquis d'Anguilhon has not a pointed beard and is not wearing a ruffle and a doublet."

"Well, we must call d'Anguilhon here and request him to array himself as a Seigneur of Blonay for the next costume ball."

"Oh, please do not," said Annie, colouring. "You would make me appear ridiculous. I am not at all anxious to see him like that, either," she added drily.

Annie and her cousin thoroughly enjoyed the evening. The young men they met were extremely attentive. Every one said very pleasant things to them, so that they experienced, the whole time, the delightful sensation which success gives.

There is nothing more fascinating than a resemblance and Annie could not help looking at Jacques, because he had the straight nose and the eyes and smile of that portrait, copied from one of Van Dyck's, which had so charmed her that she had underlined it in her Baedeker.

She was longing to dance with the descendant of

the "Seigneur of Blonay." It would have been very exciting and she would have enjoyed telling about it afterwards, but Jacques, in obedience to the instructions he had received from the Duchess de Blanzac, did not approach her and the disappointment she felt somewhat spoiled the evening for her.

The following day, on writing down in her diary the principal features of the evening's entertainment, she finished with the words: "Saw a live Marquis."

X

CHAPTER IX

At the Gàlerie Georges Petit, Rue de Sèze, a sale was going on for the benefit of Waifs and Strays. There were stalls very tastefully arranged, elegant women in their light spring dresses, a most harmonious blending of colour, lively chattering, and plenty of grace and coquetry, all, in fact, that goes to make up a Charity Bazaar.

At the end of the room was a sign with the name "Colombin" in huge letters and under this was a long table beautifully decorated with flowers. On the table were samovars, bottles of wine, bowls of punch, pyramids of cakes, sandwiches, fruit, etc. To the right and left a few small tables had been arranged after the fashion of the real Colombin the famous confectioner of the Rue Cambon. This buffet had been organised and provided by Madame de Keradieu, Miss Villars, and Miss May. All three of them were selling and serving, as though they had never done anything else but this in their lives.

Towards four o'clock, the Marquis d'Anguilhon and the Viscount de Nozay arrived. On seeing the Van Dyck, as Clara had surnamed Jacques, Annie was delighted.

Madame de Keradieu presented both of the young men with a buttonhole of corn-flowers, such as she was wearing herself.

"Put these in your coats," she said. "I will engage you both as waiters. We shall have crowds of people here soon and we cannot do all the work ourselves."

"That is what I call taking a mean advantage," said Jacques, putting the flowers in his buttonhole.

"Are you complaining?"

"Not at all, I am only too delighted to be able to do anything for you. The only thing is, I am terribly awkward. At any rate, I will pay beforehand for what I break," and the Marquis put a twenty-franc piece into the little basket which served as cash-box.

"A brilliant idea," said Guy, following his friend's example. "You know how awkward I am," he added. "Do not give me anything fragile or valuable to handle. It will be at your own risk."

"We are to reserve a table for Madame de Blanzac," said the Marquis.

"Yes, she is coming to 'five o'clocker' here," added Guy.

"To 'five o'clocker'!" repeated Madame de Keradieu, laughing. "Oh, Monsieur de Nozay!"

"Well, as people will call tea the 'five o'clock,' instead of using our nice French word *gouter,* there is nothing for it but to make a verb. I five o'clock, you five o'clock, he five o'clocks, etc. I cannot think why we should let ourselves be Americanised in this way."

"You might do worse," said Clara, sharply.

"Oh, no discussions now, please," begged Madame de Keradieu. "Now, waiters, to work and try not to be too clumsy."

"We will try," answered the two young men together. They at once went to their place at the buffet and began to pass the cups and cakes as instructed.

It was the Duchess de Blanzac who had suggested to Madame de Keradieu the idea of letting the Marquis help at the buffet, by way of keeping him out of the way of the solicitations of the other stall-holders.

The Duke de Randan, thinking that this would be a good opportunity for him, asked permission to help Jacques and Guy at the buffet. He was extremely attentive to Annie and waited on her very ostensibly. His behaviour irritated Jacques, for now he was interested in this girl himself, he did not care to have any one else paying attention to her. He did not attempt to compete with the Duke though. He talked to Madame de Keradieu, to the various women he knew, and scarcely addressed a word to Miss Villars.

Annie was still fascinated by his resemblance to the Versailles portrait and she could not help watching him. Every time that he spoke to her, or that she met his golden brown eyes, she had a little inward shock.

Between four and five the buffet was literally besieged. All the *habituées* of the real Colombin's, American women, Jewesses, and other rich foreigners arrived one after another. They soon found out the names of the young men who were helping at the buffet and it seemed as though the pleasure of being waited on by a Duke, a Marquis, and a Viscount increased their appetite considerably. They consumed an alarming quantity of cakes and the receipts were most satisfactory.

According to her promise, Christiane came to the Bazaar. She went to various stalls and made purchases, talked with her friends, and, when the crowd was less formidable at the buffet, she arrived in her turn.

"Well, are you doing good business?" she asked.

"We are coining money," answered Madame de Keradieu. "We have almost come to the end of our stores and of our strength."

"I will invite you all to tea, by way of refreshing you. Monsieur de Keradieu can find some people to take your places."

A few minutes later, the Duchess was seated at a samovar and, at her invitation, the buffet "attendants" sat down with her at her table.

Madame de Keradieu thanked the young men for their help.

"You have had great success," she said. "We should soon make our fortune, with waiters like you."

"And we have neither broken anything, nor upset anything," said Guy. "We managed very well, on the whole, although we are not accustomed to this sort of thing. Do you not agree with me, Miss May?"

"Yes, but it is very evident that you are not accustomed to it," answered Clara, laughing as she thought of the various mistakes and blunders they had made.

"Yes, you certainly need to spend one or two seasons in New York, to get used to waiting on women," put in Monsieur de Keradieu. "You see," he continued, putting on a mock-serious tone, "there is no place like America for masculine education. It is a school for chivalry, modern chivalry, I mean, of course. Young men are not required to go and fight infidels or even to win the Holy Grail, but they are made into excellent knights. They have to carry jackets and sunshades about, do all kinds of errands, and ruin themselves in sweets and flowers. At a ball, for instance, they may fan their partner, hold her champagne glass, or her plate, and she will drink in the

most leisurely way, and eat little morsels daintily with her fork. All that is very pretty exercise. I have often watched it."

Jacques raised his eyebrows with an expression of surprise.

"You are joking," he said.

"Not at all. American men accomplish such big feats that they can very well stoop to petty tasks without seeming ridiculous."

"Good, you are just, at any rate," said his wife. "I am sure, though," she continued mischievously, "that Monsieur d'Anguilhon would understand women rendering those little services to men, rather than the other way round."

"Certainly, I should," replied Jacques, in a decided tone.

Annie drew her lips together and Clara glanced at the Marquis indignantly.

"What do you think of that way of looking at things, Miss Villars?" asked the Duchess de Blanzac.

"What do I think of it? Oh, it does not concern me. It could only affect a Frenchwoman."

"A Frenchwoman? But she would think it ridiculous for a man to become her servant. If a man's prestige is to be lowered, there is not so much honour and pleasure in winning him."

"Exactly," put in Jacques.

"Then too," said the Duke de Randan, "by fanning a woman at a ball and holding her plate and glass, a man would be proclaiming his rights over her and that would be bad taste."

"Rights? Oh, my poor friends, you are behind the times. Let me tell you," continued the Baron, "that in the United States, the man has no rights. No

rights whatever," he repeated, glancing mischievously at Clara. "He asks for nothing. The principle of American women is to receive everything, to exact everything, and to give nothing. Oh, they are very clever, I can tell you."

"They are not true women, though," declared the Marquis d'Anguilhon.

"No, they are still children-prodigies, but children nevertheless. There is great childishness in their comprehension of life, in their way of treating men and of flirting. The Boston woman is an intellectual child, the Philadelphia woman is a good, reasonable child, and the New York woman a terrible child, but very brilliant and delightful all the same. When they are married to Europeans, though, they become women, true women, as you call them, Jacques."

"That is not surprising," remarked Clara. "Misfortune is supposed to ripen people."

Every one laughed at this sally.

"You see," said the Baron, "I told you that the New York woman was a terrible child."

"Yes, and brilliant and delightful," added the Viscount de Nozay.

"Christiane, it was an excellent idea to invite us to *gouter*. I use that word, because Monsieur de Nozay is keen on it," said Madame de Keradieu. "I have not enjoyed a cup of tea so much for a long time."

"Probably because you have earned it," answered Christiane.

"Perhaps."

"Oh, there is great virtue in tea," remarked Jacques. "It acts very agreeably on the brain, drives bad temper away, and makes one feel inclined to talk. I like it for its own sake and then I like it, too, because

it procures for me the pleasure of being served by women and for us poor Westerners that is rather rare. Tea is an excellent drink when it is prepared for us by refined, graceful, and intelligent hands."

"I do not quite see where the intelligence comes in," remarked the Duke de Randan.

"It is the most important thing of all," answered Jacques, seriously. "A silly, selfish, or frivolous woman cannot give you your tea as you like it. She does not trouble whether it is too strong or too weak, and she invariably gives it to you just as you do not like it. A woman who is intelligent to her very finger-tips, as we say, divines your taste and what she gives you is always perfect." Jacques glanced at the Duchess, as he said this, and it was evident that the compliment was intended for her. "I should be afraid of the other sort of woman dosing me wrongly with everything, and that she would be absolutely devoid of intuition, that sixth sense which is so necessary to women."

"Well, then, we can all rejoice," said Guy, laughing, "for the future Marchioness d'Anguilhon will give us excellent tea."

"You may count on that."

"And now, girls," said Madame de Keradieu, "let us go and shut up shop."

Annie and Clara rose and thanked their hostess, who stayed at the little table for some time talking to the old Prince de Nolles.

Whilst Madame de Keradieu was giving her orders about the packing of the silver, the Marquis d'Anguilhon approached Annie.

"It is very good of you," he said to her, "to take such interest in our little Waifs and Strays." He

looked full at her and, for the first time, with the captivating expression in his eyes, the expression Annie had seen in the portrait. A faint colour came into her face. No one had ever made such an impression on her and she was furious with herself.

"Oh, but I never thought of the little Waifs and Strays," she said, promptly. "I only thought of my own amusement. A bazaar is always such fun."

"One does not often meet with such frankness as that," remarked Jacques, delighted with Annie's sincerity.

"Miss Villars is always frank," put in the Viscount de Nozay. "I never heard as many truths expressed as since I have had the honour of knowing her."

"Truths that have been agreeable for yourself, I hope."

"Hm, I must tell you that she and I have founded a Society for mutual evolution."

"A Society for what?" asked Jacques.

"For mutual evolution," repeated Guy with comic seriousness. "To evolve is to progress. Miss Villars maintains that Europeans have not yet evolved. We are sentimentalists, idealists, excessive in everything because we have not evolved. In our country, children are subject to their parents, women can neither buy nor sell nor give their signature without their husbands' permission, simply because we have not evolved —and so on. In accordance with this theory, Miss Villars is endeavouring to fight my old prejudices and ideas and to make me give up my old gods. On my side, as I am convinced that, for her, it would be progress to adopt our system, I am trying to produce evolution in the opposite sense. You see the difficulty."

"I should say the impossibility. Besides, what good

would it do? The prejudices and gods of Europe would probably be ridiculous and in the way in America."

"Yes, but then I hope that Miss Villars will not return to America," said Guy, who sincerely hoped that Albert de Randan would win the day.

"Oh, Monsieur de Nozay!" protested Annie.

"It is not a question of Monsieur de Nozay, of course. I have my place at table at the Duchess de Blanzac's and at Madame de Keradieu's. All I ask is for a rocking-chair at your fireside. I should then be the happiest of bachelors, for I have taken the vow of celibacy like the knights of Malta."

"Well, I will invite you to the best and most comfortable rocking-chair that can be made in New York and it shall have beautiful cushions."

"A week's journey from Paris, via Havre, all that. No, thank you, I must have it here and in the Faubourg St. Germain even."

"Ah, you are asking too much," replied the girl drily.

"Of course," put in Jacques. "If the American man is like Henri's description just now, you can scarcely expect Miss Villars to prefer a Frenchman."

"On the contrary. A woman loves a man, not for his qualities, as she says, but for his faults."

"Oh!" exclaimed Annie.

"Miss May seems to think that an American woman who marries a European is doomed to unhappiness. Are you of her opinion?" asked Jacques, boldly.

"Oh, no," answered Annie, laughing. "But I do think it would be impossible to be quite happy away from one's country and one's friends. A husband cannot take the place of everything," she added, naïvely.

The Marquis looked at her with an expression of mingled surprise and disdain, which somewhat disturbed her equanimity.

"I thought, and I have always heard it said, that with women love takes the place of everything," he said, coldly.

"Ah, but you are thinking of women who have not yet evolved," remarked Guy. "Still, Madame de Keradieu left her friends and her country and she is perfectly happy. I have often heard her say that she could not go back and live in America now."

"Well, I should never like to come to that," said Annie, so decidedly that the Marquis felt a sudden discouragement.

"I count on my rocking-chair, nevertheless," remarked the Viscount.

"And I only hope that you may take back with you pleasant memories of Paris," said Jacques.

"Oh, yes, that I certainly shall," answered Annie promptly. "Every one has been so kind and so agreeable. I never expected to enjoy myself so much here."

Madame de Keradieu joined the little group at this moment.

"Do not forget that you are dining with us tomorrow at eight," she said to the young men.

"One does not forget pleasant things," answered Jacques.

"A pretty speech."

"Coming direct from the heart," corrected Jacques. "If you only call it a pretty speech, it sounds as though you think me a flatterer and, in reality, your Saturday dinners are one of the things I miss the most when I am away from Paris."

"Thank you," said Madame de Keradieu, holding

out her hand to the young man, who kissed it with the courtesy of a true *grand seigneur*.

On leaving the three American women, Jacques went to the Duchess de Blanzac.

"Are things going according to your wishes?" she asked.

"I do not know. The young person seems to me to have a very decided character."

"Have you broken the ice?"

"Yes, and as a result, I had a bucket of water over my head."

Jacques repeated the conversation he had had with Annie.

"There is nothing very discouraging in that. While you were talking, I was watching Miss Villars, and I am sure that, for some reason or another, she is interested in you. Trust to my impressions."

"Oh, I should be only too glad to have faith and to hope."

"I am going to give the pink dance, of which I spoke to you," continued Christiane. "You shall lead the cotillon with Mademoiselle de Busset, who is an ideal girl. That will give you prestige with Miss Villars."

"But I am completely out of practice. I have not done such a thing for six years."

"Oh, you will do it splendidly."

"People will think I have broken the bank at Monte Carlo."

"No matter what people think. The only thing is, do not tell a soul your intentions. Leave the field free for the Duke de Randan. He is not at all dangerous. If people imagined that you wanted the heiress, they would not fail to tell her of your pecca-

dilloes and that would serve to stifle the liking that she now has for you. Later on, when that liking has developed into love, people may say what they like. She would then only listen to her own heart."

Jacques gave a sigh of relief.

"Ah, you have raised my courage again. Just now, I must own, I felt sure that my dream was not to be realised."

"Oh, come, you must not be weak," said Madame de Blanzac. "'Faint heart never won fair lady.'"

CHAPTER X

THAT night, for the first time, perhaps, in her life, Annie could not sleep. As soon as she had put out the light, she could see the Bazaar, the Marquis d'Anguilhon's face, hear his words, accompanied as they had been by certain expressions she had read in his eyes, and all this made her mind extremely active. She began to wonder what he meant by a true woman. She supposed he was thinking of a slave, an absurdly devoted creature. She recalled his evident disapproval of the attitude of American men towards women, and this made her think of Frank Barnett. How devoted he had always been and how eager to serve her. In spite of his six feet and his big fortune, he had always been ready to carry her jackets and her sunshades. And more than once, too, he had fanned her. What a good fellow he was! She could not imagine him kissing a woman's hand. He would look ridiculous doing that, whilst it seemed quite natural to the Marquis. It was rather a pretty custom, after all, and Antoinette de Keradieu seemed to have grown quite accustomed to it. And yet to feel the sensation of a man's lips on her hand must surely be horrible. —Annie then began to think of what Jacques had said about the serving of the tea. She vowed to herself that she would never pour tea for him. What an amount of imagination any one must have to discover

so much in such an everyday thing. And how cold and disdainful he had looked when she had said that a husband could not take the place of everything. She ought not to talk like that before foreigners. It had, perhaps, given the Marquis a very bad opinion of American women. He had, probably, not thought her good enough for a Frenchman, for instead of seconding Monsieur de Nozay he had seemed to be wishing her a safe journey back to America. The idea that she was to dine with him, the following day at Madame de Keradieu's, caused her a certain joy, not unmingled with anxiety. She said to herself that she should never feel quite at ease with him. He seemed so haughty. How very much he resembled the Seigneur de Blonay.—She was gradually getting sleepy and her thoughts became more and more confused. She could see the Versailles portrait distinctly, but soon after the faces of the ancestor and the descendant became confused and finally she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI

After the Bazaar, Annie and Jacques met almost daily, but they did not appear to make friends easily at all. The young man was introduced to Mrs. Villars, but he merely left his card at her hotel afterwards. He was always strictly correct but rather cold when he met Annie out and did not pay her any special attention. In spite of this, and perhaps even on this account, he excited her feminine curiosity. When she saw him talking to any one else, she always wondered what he was saying, and every word of his to her seemed to linger in her mind. She was interested in all he did and she could not help watching him always. One evening, at the Duchess de Blanzac's, she happened to be in the hall at the same time that he was, when he was leaving, and she noticed the way he took his coat from the footman. She was charmed by his extreme refinement. He was so different from most of the other men and, even in the most commonplace details of everyday life, he seemed like a superior being.

She had managed to get Madame de Keradieu to tell her the history of the Marquis d'Anguilhon and his family. She was very sorry that he was not rich. It seemed a pity that this descendant of the handsome Joyeuse d'Anguilhon, with the ruffle and doublet, should be obliged to go about on foot or in cabs. He

ought to have had any amount of money, fine horses, and the best carriages in Paris.

The Duchess de Blanzac's pink dance was to take place on the 6th of May. Annie was looking forward to it with the greatest pleasure and no doubt the idea that she would dance with "the Van Dyck" added considerably to her excitement. When the great day really arrived and she was driving to the ball, she felt that it was ridiculous to be so excited, but she could not help it in the least.

The two girls were wearing beautiful dresses of different shades of pink, but which harmonised admirably and suited their complexion and the colour of their hair.

The Duchess de Blanzac was charmed with their appearance as they entered her drawing-room. She complimented them warmly and this gave Annie a certain assurance.

Jacques looked very well in his faultlessly cut clothes. He was wearing a rose in his buttonhole, and when he advanced to claim the waltz Annie had promised him, she gave him her hand at once. A most curious thing then happened. Under the impulse of his wish to conquer the young girl, Jacques held her almost too firmly and carried her off, like a prey, into the whirl of the dance, the whole length of the room. Annie drew herself up instinctively and Jacques, feeling her resistance, held her still more firmly, not giving way at all. Gradually Annie became more supple in his arms, her feet followed his docilely, and the waltz finished in the most perfect, intoxicating, and delicious harmony. When the Marquis took Annie back to her mother, her cheeks were as pink as her dress. Jacques' eyes shone with triumph. He had

had too much experience with women not to be fully aware that he had just won a victory. The young girl had unconsciously obeyed him and this was a great deal.

Annie did not realise what had taken place, but she felt that this waltz had brought them nearer together and had created a sort of understanding between them. When he thanked her, the Marquis had looked at her in a peculiar way, with a gentle expression that had given her great joy. In the mirrors too, as they were dancing, she had seen the outline of their two figures, drawn together, swaying in rhythm to the music of the dance. This picture had been photographed in her brain and would produce the desired effect.

CHAPTER XII

THE day following the Duchess de Blanzac's ball, Mrs. Villars' drawing-room, bright with the flames from the open fire and brilliantly lighted by several lamps, was very picturesque. Here and there were draperies of antique embroidered silks, on the side-tables and on the mantelpiece were valuable curios and unframed pictures, which represented the discoveries and purchases of the last few weeks. There were spring flowers everywhere and, hanging on nails, cotillon trophies. The three American women were writing most diligently. Their brilliant complexions, beautiful hair, and light dresses seemed to add still more brightness to the room. Mrs. Villars was seated at her little table and Annie and Clara in front of the fire, with their writing-cases on their knees. They only stopped writing to ask each other for information or to see whether some detail were quite correct. Their pens seemed inexhaustible and line after line was added, until at last each of them had quite a collection of sheets ready for post.

Towards nine o'clock, one of the hotel pages announced Madame de Keradieu.

"Antoinette!" exclaimed the girls, getting up to welcome their visitor, and quickly putting aside all their writing materials.

"Oh, I am interrupting the letters," said the visitor. "I am sorry."

"It does not matter at all. We have plenty of time for that," replied Mrs. Villars. "Where is Monsieur de Keradieu?"

"He will be here soon. He went to the Club to meet Jacques d'Anguilhon. He asked him to go and look at those horses that Annie saw. Henri wanted to have his opinion, for he is one of the best judges of horses in Paris."

"Oh, it was no use asking him though," said the girl promptly, "for I have quite decided on the bay. It is certainly the more beautiful one; it is a fine animal."

"Yes, but Henri is doubtful about it and he prefers not being entirely responsible."

"He is quite right," said Mrs. Villars. "Annie is horribly imprudent. It is quite enough for any one to tell her that a horse is dangerous. She at once wants it. Oh, she is her father's own child."

"Oh, as for you, mother, you would like me never to ride a horse under twenty years of age," said Annie laughing.

"Well, what did you think of the ball?" asked Madame de Keradieu.

"It was splendid, perfect, as a whole and in every detail," answered Annie, enthusiastically.

"Yes, it certainly was perfect," agreed Madame de Keradieu. "It was a dream for a colourist. That pink whirlpool, with all the shades mingling and, at times, causing the black coats to disappear, was most effective. I do not remember such a gay and brilliant ball. Every woman dancing looked under thirty. Ah, the men did not want any persuading last night. They were all willing enough to dance."

"The Duchess de Blanzac is an excellent hostess,"

put in Mrs. Villars, "and she looked very beautiful."

"Yes, did she not?" said Antoinette, looking pleased. "And then what a delightful cotillon we had."

"The little wheelbarrows of roses were a brilliant idea," put in Clara.

"And what about this?" said Annie, getting up and taking a large straw hat from a screen. She put it on her head and turned to Madame de Keradieu:

"Look how well it suits me," she continued. "I shall wear it at the sea. Just think, a straw hat that might cost four sous, with a hundred francs' worth of *chic*. It looks like one of Virot's creations."

"It is one of her creations."

"There, you see, I am right!" exclaimed Annie, triumphantly.

"All the same," remarked Clara, "we do things on a bigger scale in America."

"On too big a scale even. In France, it would be thought bad taste to offer expensive presents to one's guests instead of mere souvenirs."

"Bad taste?" repeated Clara in a vexed tone. "I do not see why we should conform to the European code of what is fitting. We are quite capable of making a code for ourselves. We have no *châteaux* to keep up and our wealth, not being hampered by expenses, keeps increasing, thanks to our work. We are quite free to give fêtes that are considered too magnificent, if that should amuse us. We are free to cover ourselves with jewellery and to give expensive presents to our friends."

"But, my dear girl, beauty and taste have certain recognised rules. The first of these rules is simplicity. It is better to keep to that than to err on the other side."

"Oh, well, I am quite satisfied with us as we are," said Clara, in an amusing way. "I prefer profusion to niggardliness, and youth to old age. Five years ago, on our last trip to Europe, my father took it into his head to go to Devonshire and see the place we came from. We found the old family home, a grey, dilapidated house, and, in the background, century-old trees with rooks' nests. It seemed to us like the abomination of desolation. We went to visit the family graves, in the church and cemetery near. Whilst my father was deciphering some of the names, I thought of our house in Washington Square and of our fine New York cemetery, where the dead seem to be so rich and so comfortable, and I exclaimed: 'Thank God that there was a May intelligent enough to go to America.'"

"Oh, Clara, you are perfectly impossible," said Madame de Keradieu.

"I went and bought some flowers," continued the girl, 'and I put some on those poor tombstones, all chipped away by the damp."

"Well, that was a nice, poetical idea, at any rate."

"Oh, I do not know about its being poetical. I simply felt that I ought to take a few flowers to the graves of those people whose name I bear. Really and truly though, I have never come to Europe without congratulating myself that I was born an American. And how I do pity French girls! Fancy always being watched over and held in a leash like a spaniel. It would make me absolutely evil. I do not fancy they are angels either. They are shy and nervous rather than modest. They blush when a man comes near them and only answer in monosyllables, but their eyes speak volumes. I have never seen an American

girl with such a look in her eyes. Every gesture and every movement is unnatural. They might be acting in some drawing-room comedy. If they had as much liberty as we have, Heaven knows what they might do with it."

"Very foolish things, probably," said Madame de Keradieu, "foolish things that would be irreparable. When people are not used to liberty, it is a dangerous thing. Our system of education is all very well for America, but it would have deplorable consequences here. If I had a daughter, I should bring her up as a French girl."

"Oh, Antoinette!" exclaimed Annie.

"Yes, and very strictly too; the habits and customs of the country require it."

"Nice habits and customs!" put in Clara.

"Well, let us be honest. If girls in America can be emancipated without running much danger, to whom do we owe this? To the men who respect them, more than they respect themselves. Is not that so?"

"Yes, it certainly is, and the liberty they are allowed is beginning to have disastrous consequences. In America, at present, there is an alarming looseness with regard to principles and customs."

"I used to think as Clara does," continued Madame de Keradieu. "The system of feminine education in Europe used to seem barbarous to me. I now find that it has many advantages. In the first place, it enables girls to have a longer time of innocence, reverie, and illusions. It also preserves their moral and physical freshness and that is a great charm, a charm that men appreciate greatly."

"I hope you do not approve of the way marriages are arranged in France?" said Annie.

"Yes, I do, for it is the outcome of the system of education. It has its good side, too. It very rarely happens that parents oblige their daughter to marry a man she does not care for. Before a young man is introduced to her, the parents have made inquiries about him, about his family, his past life, his health, and his character. In this way, she has a certain security and does not run the risk of giving her affection to a man unworthy of it."

"Well, I can only see one advantage in the system," said Clara. "If the marriage turns out badly, a French girl has the satisfaction of being able to lay the blame on her father and mother, whilst with us, we can only tear our own hair out, as the fault is always our own, and that is annoying."

"Ah, I never thought of that," said Madame de Keradieu, very much amused.

"But a girl could never love a husband chosen by her parents," objected Annie.

"And why not, if you please? You have no idea how quickly a girl falls in love when she has been brought up within convent walls or in austere surroundings. Henri maintains that the love born of marriage is the strongest and most lasting of all love and I believe it is."

"And yet there are not many happy marriages in France," said Clara.

"That is quite a mistake, my dear girl. You must not judge society by the novels or by the stage as, for some incomprehensible reason, we get nothing but scenes from fast life. Temptations of all kinds abound in Paris and conjugal faithfulness may be more rare there, but Paris is not the French nation. In the provinces, people are very serious and even rigid, and

families are very united. You may take my word for it that you will not find as many fine characters and virtuous people anywhere as you will find in France."

"Is Mademoiselle de Busset, who led the cotillon with Monsieur d'Anguilhon, rich?" asked Annie, abruptly.

"Yes, she will have rather a big dowry."

"Well, she would be the wife for your friend, then."

"Why, Annie," exclaimed Madame de Keradieu, "are you suggesting marrying for money?"

"Oh, I do not approve of that way of increasing one's income. Still, I can better understand now that a man with a great name, a title, and no money may be obliged to look out for a dowry."

"He might work," suggested Clara.

"But if every one were producing and earning money, there would soon be too many on the field."

"In America, every one is producing and earning money," persisted Clara.

"Yes, it does not matter there, as our country is immense and then, too, it is a country that is still being made. We are too rich, though, already. Henri maintains a theory which sounds like a paradox, but on thinking it over you will see that it is true. He says that every living creature works, as every one is active in some way and every one spends and absorbs. There are beings of a luxurious kind, just as there are thoroughbred horses, but they are not more idle than the other sort. Take the Duchess de Blanzac, for instance. It took her quite a fortnight of hard work to organise that ball, and the ball gave work to numbers of arms, legs, and brains and cost about a hundred thousand francs. The Marquis d'Anguilhon could not paint pictures, but he would know what pictures to

buy. I am very sorry indeed that he does not own millions, for he would make the best possible use of them, and it is not at all an easy thing to spend well. Mademoiselle de Busset's dowry would not be enough for him, and I very much fear that he will be the last of his race. He will never marry, if he cannot keep up his rank, get back the Blonay château, and keep up their house in the Rue de Varenne."

"It is a wonder that he has not tried to capture some poor American heiress."

"He had the opportunity of marrying one who was immensely rich."

"Really?"

"Yes. Two years ago, the Marchioness Taller took it into her head to get him married to a wealthy heiress. All seemed to be going splendidly, when Monsieur d'Anguilhon suddenly declared that he did not want to marry. From what I gathered the young person was a *parvenue,* one of those American girls who persist in wearing whole bushes of flowers, and rings that are much too noticeable. The long and short of it is that Madame Taller has never forgiven him. With a mother like his, he could never marry a girl with no education. Next time we go to America, we intend to take him with us. I should like him to have a right idea of our country. We like him very much. What do you think of him?"

"I like him," answered Annie, promptly.

"His nose is perfect," added her cousin.

"Oh, Clara!" protested Madame de Keradieu.

"Well, I have a weakness for a well-cut nose. It was George's nose that made me accept him. I am sure I shall be glad to look at it all my life."

"I like Frenchmen better than I should have

thought it possible to like them," said Annie. "They are so amusing, and even interesting. Some of them, not all, by any means, have a very nice way with women."

"It would be droll if Annie were to marry a Frenchman, after all," said Madame de Keradieu.

"Oh, as to that, never!" answered the young girl, emphatically.

"Thank Heaven, she still has a gleam of common-sense," put in Clara.

"That is nice for me, considering that I am married to a Frenchman."

"Oh, well, your husband is your excuse. You must admit that there are not many like him in Paris."

"Nor anywhere else."

Just at this moment, there was a rap at the door and, to the surprise of every one, Monsieur de Keradieu appeared accompanied by Jacques.

Annie could not help feeling a certain emotion. Monsieur d'Anguilhon apologised for arriving in the evening in so informal a way.

"Oh, yes, I had to drag him in by sheer force," said Monsieur de Keradieu. "I thought that the two of us might perhaps manage to persuade Miss Villars to give up the idea of the bay horse to which she has taken such a fancy."

"Give it up? Never! I tried it yesterday at the riding-school. We understand each other perfectly already and I feel quite sure that I can hold him in."

"Yes, but d'Anguilhon has the same impression that I had. We both think the creature capable of playing a trick on its rider."

"Oh, Annie, do not be obstinate," implored Mrs. Villars.

"But, mother, you do not understand anything about horses," replied the girl, slightly irritated. "I believe you can just tell their heads from their tails."

Every one laughed except Jacques, and Annie felt intuitively that he was rather badly impressed by her retort.

"It is true," she continued, more gently," that one must love riding to understand the pleasure there is in mounting a lively thoroughbred that is a little difficult to manage."

"I certainly do not understand that pleasure, but I do understand the grief it would be to me if you were to be crippled and disfigured."

"Do not be alarmed, Madame," said Jacques, "we will not let your daughter buy a dangerous horse."

"But what vice have you discovered in this bay?"

"None, except that it is extremely nervous. Mounted by a man, there would be no fear of anything happening, but I should not like to see a woman on its back."

"But it is such a beautiful creature," said Annie, her eyes moist with vexation and disappointment.

"Agreed, but the other one is superb too. You will have your work before you there, but he is more even. It is a horse for a queen."

Annie was just on the verge of making another impatient speech. She tried to brave Jacques' eyes which were fixed full on her.

"You are two to one," she said, shrugging her shoulders and twisting the end of her waistband nervously. "I am obliged to give in. I will have the other one."

"That's right. There's a reasonable girl. It is not often that an American gives in with such good grace," said Monsieur de Keradieu.

"Are they so very independent?" asked Jacques.

"Independent? I should just think they are. In the first place, in the United States, every one refrains from giving advice even to one's nearest and dearest relatives. With us, we should call the system egoism; over there they call it respect for individual liberty. An American I know read the little notice here in the omnibus by which the Prefect of Police advises the passengers not to get out until they see that they can do so without danger. He was amazed and thought the warning not only ridiculous but impertinent. He considered that it was an infringement on one's liberty—the liberty we have to get run over if we like. That will give you an idea of the spirit of the country."

"Then, Mademoiselle, I must ask you to forgive me for having wished to prevent you from breaking your neck," said Jacques, with a sly smile.

"And in accordance with European ways and customs, I suppose I ought to thank you for your interest on my behalf?"

"Certainly," answered Jacques.

"Bravo," exclaimed Monsieur de Keradieu, "now you have each done your duty."

"I am surprised that you had the courage to marry an American woman," said Annie, by way of avenging herself on some one for the defeat she had just sustained.

"You see, I am naturally brave," replied Monsieur de Keradieu, "and then I felt that I should be able to obtain my wife's respect and submission."

"Oh, poor American women! If only they knew what awaited them in Europe!" remarked Clara, in a joking way.

"They would all come, if they did know," said Monsieur de Keradieu, promptly. He then caught sight of the blotting cases and letters. "Ah," he continued, "and so you were writing? I am sure you have sent home good descriptions of the ball last night. In a hundred years' time, there will be some interesting documents about Europe to be found in the United States. All this correspondence will then be very valuable."

"I hope ours may be as valuable as the rest," said Annie.

The two men now rose to take leave and, whilst Madame de Keradieu was putting on her mantle, Annie said to the baron:

"Well, then, I count on you for buying me the famous horse."

"Yes, you will have it the day after to-morrow and then we will begin our morning rides."

"I shall be thankful, for I need exercise and fresh air."

Just before leaving, the Marquis d'Anguilhon looked full at Annie and said, quietly:

"You do not owe me any grudge, do you?"

He held out his hand to her for the first time and Annie put her hand in his and said with a gay smile:

"None whatever."

When the visitors had gone, the three women sat down again to their writing, but Annie could no longer give her mind to her letter. The conversation that had just taken place, and the face of "Van Dyck" kept interfering with her descriptions. No, she could not imagine the descendant of the Seigneur de Blonay marrying a vulgar American girl. It would be a great pity, too, she thought. She felt sure that the Marquis

d'Anguilhon would not be a very easy man to get on with. How authoritative he had been just now, and yet she could not bear him any ill-will, for it was, after all, a proof of his interest in her welfare. She felt as though they had now become friends and this thought made her quite joyous. Without being aware of it herself at the time, she felt that ever since she had first met him she had wanted to be on friendly terms with him.

CHAPTER XIII

The Marquis, on his side, knew that the ice was now broken for Miss Villars and himself. The next time he met her, he talked to her as though he had now entered into the circle of her life and were not going out of it again.

He talked to Annie in a friendly way, which put her completely off her guard. In spite of Jacques' absolutely simple manners, she stood somewhat in awe of him and would not have ventured to joke with him just as she did with the Viscount de Nozay or the Baron de Keradieu. When he was present, she never attacked European routine and prejudices and, although she was always decided, she was unconsciously more gentle. With him, too, she was more careful about her French. If she made any mistake, he always corrected her very calmly, and she was grateful to him for this. She liked him to come and talk to her, as this flattered her vanity. When he was with her, she always felt more important, and she had never had this sentiment with any other man, not even with the Duke de Randan.

Although Jacques never paid her any compliments, she could tell when he was especially pleased with her appearance, and the delight that this caused her animated her whole expression.

Annie did not realise the gravity of these symptoms

and, strangely enough, she thought more of Frank Barnett just now than she had thought of him since she had left New York. She remembered all the pleasant excursions in his yacht and all the fêtes of which she had been the queen. A hundred different instances of his kindness and generosity came to her mind. She wrote to his sister, Mrs. Adair, a letter of some twenty pages, knowing full well that he would read it through, from the first line to the last, and she asked for a photograph of his villa at Lenox. She very often looked at his portrait and, one day, she took it up, gazed at it attentively, and said aloud: "What a good fellow he is!" A kind of secret instinct seemed to draw her towards this friend of her childhood, just at a time when her fate was separating her from him for ever.

Jacques, though perfectly tranquil to all appearances, was feverishly anxious. At one moment he was most hopeful, and directly afterwards thoroughly discouraged. He kept wondering whether this marriage was to be or was not to be and, with his nerves strained to the utmost tension, he kept trying to look ahead.

He had ample time and opportunity for studying Annie. She was quite a fresh type of girl to him, with her studied elegance, her independent character and manners and her knowledge of life and of the world. He was somewhat disconcerted by her and even a trifle horrified. He soon saw though, that, in spite of her emancipation, her soul was very fresh and even childlike and he was greatly impressed by her pure mind. Underneath her modernism he saw that she had the qualities which are peculiar to people of old standing and he said to himself that, thanks to these qualities, she and his mother would get on well

together. He was delighted with her pleasantness, for it was so easy to entertain and interest her. It was not necessary to go far afield when he wanted to get her attention. He felt a sort of restfulness and repose when he was with her, as she was not at all like the women with complex natures he had hitherto known. He realised though, that although it was easy to entertain her, it would not be easy to win her. She was neither sensuous, romantic, nor ambitious, so that he could not find any vulnerable point. The more he saw of her, the more he realised how much of a foreigner she was and how devoted she was to her own country and to her own people. When, with her usual assurance, she talked to him about her return to America, or showed him some fresh acquisition for their New York house, he could not help feeling a slight pang and, for days afterwards, everything seemed very gloomy to him, and he would say to himself that the idea of this marriage was nothing but one of the snares and delusions that a man so often finds on his pathway through life.

Jacques had frequent opportunities of judging Annie's strength of character. One evening, at the Duchess de Blanzac's, she had declined to play poker, because it was Sunday. The Duke de Randan had suggested that God could not really mind whether people played cards or not that day.

"That may be so," said Annie, "indeed it very probably is so, but, as my religion forbids me, I cannot play."

The others were all cruel enough to persuade her, but she resisted, although tears of disappointment came into her eyes.

This strong sense of duty had raised her consider-

ably in Jacques' esteem, but it also alarmed him, for, as he said to himself, the same sense of duty might urge her to refuse to marry a Catholic. He recognised now how wise Madame de Lène had been in insisting that he should put himself in the hands of the Duchess de Blanzac. If it had not been for her, he would certainly have tried to hurry matters and so would have lost every possible chance of success. She guided him with that tact and skill peculiar to extremely intelligent women. She knew that if Jacques failed now, he would start for Africa, and she was sure that in his disappointment he would be utterly reckless of his life. This marriage became the great subject of her thoughts and there were days when, on seeing Annie and thinking of the power this girl held in her hands, she was tempted to say straight out to her: "Do try to save him." Ever since she had taken the matter up herself, she had felt worried and anxious. She realised now that she ought never to have mixed herself up with this marriage, but it was very clear that she could not get out of it now.

She was always thinking how she could help Jacques and she was constantly inventing opportunities for him to meet Annie. She talked of him frequently to the girl and very cleverly showed up all his good qualities. Her knowledge of the feminine mind was so thorough that every word she uttered carried. Providence had certainly chosen its instrument admirably.

The Duchess de Blanzac studied Annie with intense curiosity. She saw that she was interested in Jacques and that his presence acted on her. If on entering the room, he did not very soon go and talk to her, Annie would watch him nervously and become absent-minded.

When he approached her, a joyful light would come into her eyes and her whole face would take a gentler expression.

Of course all this might be a straw fire, due simply to vanity. Christiane did not dare raise Jacques' hopes too much, but she told him that she thought he had a fair chance of success.

He called on her every day to talk things over. He always arrived a little before two o'clock, in order to find her alone. She always awaited his visit with a certain anxiety. Sometimes he would arrive with a radiant face, and at others looking very much discouraged. He kept her well posted, told her every incident connected with himself and Annie, and even repeated to her their conversations. The Duchess listened attentively, gave him advice, and generally succeeded in instilling into him the calmness and force that he needed.

After talking about Annie, they would discuss a hundred other interesting subjects, art, literature, philosophy, and social topics. These talks seemed to draw them together again, after the separation which the various events of their respective lives had caused between them. This exchange of ideas and of sentiments joined, once more, the thread of their two existences and worked on their souls in a subtle, unconscious way which was to take effect in the future.

CHAPTER XIV

Clara was at St. Germain with some of her friends, and Mrs. Villars and Annie had dined alone. On leaving the table, Annie picked up the newspaper and looked at the theatrical column.

"Oh, they are giving the *Brigands,* this evening," she said, "at the Variétés. I have never seen it and it is the last time they will give it this season. Why not go?"

"Alone?"

"Why not? We will take Catherine and engage one of those lower boxes in which you are scarcely seen at all. It will be fun."

"Very well, we will go to the Variétés," said Mrs. Villars, who never liked to deprive her daughter of anything which could amuse her.

Annie at once gave the necessary orders to their courier and ordered a little oyster and champagne supper, enjoying the thought of Clara's surprise when she returned.

An hour later, she was seated in one of those mysterious looking boxes, which had often tempted her. She lifted the screen, in order to be still less seen.

"There," she said laughing, "we are quite at home now."

The house was full, but with a very ordinary public, chiefly composed of tourists, middle-class people, and

servants. There were also about a dozen men in dress coats and, in the orchestra stalls, a few foreign women, the elegant toilettes of girls making a pleasant contrast to the dull-looking house on this last night of the season. Annie did not see a single face she knew. Suddenly, her heart began to beat quickly, for in the doorway she had just caught sight of Jacques. She could scarcely believe her eyes and all at once she felt most uneasy. It was all in vain that she began to say to herself that she had every right to come to the Variétés, if she liked, with her mother. She was not at all sure that she had not been rather imprudent. She knew how strict the Marquis d'Anguilhon was about all matters of etiquette and she felt rather afraid that he might disapprove. She wished they could get away and she was delighted that, at any rate, they were invisible. Only two of the boxes had their screens up and, as soon as there was an interval, the young men began to promenade in front of them, hoping to recognise the occupants. They only glanced at the one on the left, but they kept coming back and standing in front of the one in which the three women were seated. One of them, who looked like a wealthy foreigner, was particularly bold. He planted himself in the middle of the gangway and gazed in a daring way at the girl who was so well chaperoned and so jealously guarded. Annie was amused at first at the curiosity she was exciting, but she soon began to feel alarmed at these gleaming eyes fixed on her. She had never been stared at in this way. She changed colour and her confusion increased when she became convinced she had been taken for a *demi-mondaine*. Mrs. Villars and Catherine gave vent to their indignation.

Jacques had remained in his place, but was standing up, with his back to the stage looking at the house. He soon noticed what was going on around the mysterious box and, curious to see the woman who was causing the sensation, he strolled down towards the box and glanced in as he passed. He was horrified on recognising Annie and her mother. Just at first he had a bad impression, but he quickly guessed how matters stood. He went quickly into the lobby, knocked at the door of the box, entered, and, before pronouncing a word, lowered the screen. He was very pale and evidently rather excited.

"Excuse me," he said to the two women, "but that screen might cause you most disagreeable adventures."

"Ah, that was why people were gazing at us in such a strange way?" said Mrs. Villars. "Thank you very much for coming to tell us."

"What harm can there be in putting up the screens?" asked Annie, quite disconcerted.

"There is really no harm, but they are only used by people who have special reasons for hiding themselves, or who do not wish to be seen in bad company."

"Oh," exclaimed Annie, "I had no idea of that."

"No, you could not, of course, have any idea of such things," said Jacques, smiling.

"I ought to have known," put in Mrs. Villars.

Annie laughed.

"Oh, fancy your imagining such things! You are much less likely to than I am."

This remark of a daughter to her mother seemed to Jacques simply delightful.

"This country is full of traps," continued Annie, with a shade of annoyance in her voice. "In America,

women are safe everywhere. Here, a girl cannot go with her mother and her maid to see the *Brigands.*"

"Oh, yes," said Jacques," provided you do not take a box with screens. Confess now that you felt it was a little risky and that the forbidden fruit tempted you."

"Yes," she owned frankly, colouring slightly, "it did."

"You see with us a woman can come and go, say and do what she likes, provided she keeps within the bounds that are allowed her. If, out of thoughtlessness or out of curiosity, she takes it into her head to overstep the boundaries, men consider that they, too, are entitled to go beyond the boundaries and she risks being taken for what she is not," said Jacques.

"And that is just what has happened to us to-night, thanks to my daughter's brilliant idea," observed Mrs. Villars.

"Those horrible young men have gone," said Annie.

"Yes, they see that they were mistaken. You need not be afraid now."

"We can congratulate ourselves that you chanced to come to this theatre to-night," continued Mrs. Villars.

"I do not think there is such a thing as chance," replied Jacques. "I went as far as the Gymnase with a friend and, on my way back, I was looking at the poster outside this theatre, when a street hawker put a programme into my hand. I felt irresistibly drawn towards the entrance and I now see why." He glanced at Annie as he said this with an expression in his eyes which somewhat disturbed her equanimity.

The curtain was just being raised and Jacques moved towards the door to return to his place, but Mrs. Villars invited him to remain in their box.

Annie appeared to be giving all her attention to the play, but the light in her eyes, the expression of her whole face, and the slight quivering of her lips betrayed sensations which Offenbach's music could never have produced. Jacques' glance had been so direct and so tender that it had given her the most delightful joy, and she now felt proud and happy to be under his protection. Within the limited space of the box, his magnetism acted strongly on her and, for the first time, she was conscious that there was a bond between them.

She did not turn round towards him until the end of the act and then she said, in a voice that trembled slightly:

"Do you know that the Duchess is going to Deauville for two days and she is taking Clara and me with her? She wants to tempt us to rent a villa there for the season."

"Oh, I warn you that a conspiracy has been organised to prevent your going to England, and I am at the head of it," said Jacques, boldly.

"You!" exclaimed Annie, again confused.

"Yes I am to spend July and August near Trouville with an uncle, and I shall be very glad if you are there. Besides, you really ought to see Normandy. There are some curious little towns and a few fine châteaux to visit. The suburbs of Trouville and Deauville are charming. You can ride, boat, drive the English gig that Keradieu will not let you drive in the Bois. Then, too, you can torment that poor Guy de Nozay, drive the Duke de Randan to despair, and finish by converting me to modernism."

"Finish converting you in two months!" exclaimed Annie, impulsively. "Why, it would take years."

As soon as she had uttered these words, she realised what they might signify and her face flushed to the roots of her hair.

"Well, let it take years," said Jacques, half joking and half in earnest, and not appearing to notice Annie's embarrassment.

"Putting my selfishness out of the question, though," he continued, "it seems to me you would be better at Deauville, in July and August, than in England. What do you think, Madame?" he asked, turning to Mrs. Villars.

"Oh, I should certainly prefer going to the sea to commencing churches and picture galleries again."

"You hear that," said Jacques, triumphantly.

"Oh, yes, but I did not come to Europe to lead the life of a society woman and waste my time at a seaside place. What will they say in America if I go back without having seen England?"

"You can go in September."

"And what about Switzerland?"

"You can keep that for another time."

"I would rather keep to the plan I mapped out. I blame myself already for having departed from it. We were to start for London the last week in May, and Madame de Keradieu persuaded us to stay for the Grand Prix. Then Mr. Ottis's sister arrived and Clara wanted to stay until the 15th. Now, there is this question of Deauville and Antoinette wants us to go to her in Touraine. You see what all these changes are doing. It is very odd, but ever since I have been over here, I do not do what I had decided to do, or what I really ought to do. Some one or something upsets my plans all the time."

"I feel very much inclined to try the effect of

suggestion on you," said Jacques, "and to make it impossible for you to go away."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Annie, as though terror-stricken, "please do not."

Jacques feared that he had gone too far.

"Do not be alarmed," he said, "I have not the 'power.' Your friendship for the Keradieus and the beauty of Deauville will keep you, I hope. Own now that you are just a little tempted to stay with us?"

"I am very much tempted," replied Annie, with her usual candour.

"That's right."

"It seems to me that it is wrong," said Annie, slowly.

"Wrong to give pleasure to your friends?"

"No, but to let one's self be persuaded like this. I really believe that this country is demoralising."

During this conversation, Catherine, who had not understood a word of it, had been observing her young mistress and the Marquis. Curiosity, surprise, and anxiety could have been read on her face. Jacques had not been paying any attention to her, but he suddenly met her limpid eyes fixed full on him. From the hostile expression he read in them, he realised that the good woman had guessed his intentions. He felt slightly embarrassed and feared lest she might put Annie on her guard. In order to deceive her, he at once appeared absolutely indifferent and, noticing this sudden change and fearing she had unintentionally vexed him, Annie turned to him several times and laughed with him over the amusing part of the play.

After the curtain fell, Jacques accompanied Mrs. Villars and Annie to their carriage. Mrs. Villars

thanked him warmly and Annie, for the first time, put out her hand voluntarily to him.

He clasped it warmly and said to her:

"Let the decision about Deauville be satisfactory."

Jacques went away feeling happy and almost triumphant. He walked home thinking over the various incidents of the evening. Providence was certainly with him. There could be no doubt about that. The circumstance of the box had been most useful to him. Then he had been, as it were, inspired to make a sort of declaration to Annie. His words had caused her a certain emotion, but had not alarmed her. In her limpid eyes, he had seen that special gleam which he knew well and which is only caused by love. He had felt distinctly that she was in his power. He was sure that she would not go away, and if she went to Deauville, it meant victory. He felt certain now, for the first time, that this marriage was to be.

He did not care to go to his club with the deep joy in his heart that he now felt. In order that it should last longer, and that he could more thoroughly appreciate it, he turned homewards and, whilst smoking an exquisite cigar, began once more the dreams of happiness and fortune from which he had so often been abruptly roused.

. . . . . .

Clara arrived at the hotel before her aunt and cousin and was surprised to find them out.

"Well," she said, when they returned, "and so you take advantage of my absence for going to the little theatres!"

"Oh, we have had quite enough of them, I can assure you," replied Mrs. Villars, telling what had happened.

"Why, it was quite an adventure, and to think that I missed it! I should like to have seen the 'Van Dyck's' face when he discovered you in a private box with the screen up."

"He was very useful, I can assure you," said Mrs. Villars. "If he had not been there, we should probably have been followed home, for it is quite certain that Annie was taken for a *demi-mondaine* or something of that sort."

"It is lucky for you that Monsieur d'Anguilhon did not call out your admirer, Annie. You might have fallen in love with him and offered him your hand and your money. It is true that he is in love with the Duchess, though."

Annie was standing up and her face was hidden by the lamp-shade, so that her cousin did not see the fleeting emotion which her little speech caused.

"In love with the Duchess?" repeated Annie. "Who told you so?"

"No one. It is easy enough to see it, though."

Annie made no further remark. She drank half a glass of champagne and, without touching the rest of the little supper she had ordered, she went to her room on the plea of a headache.

While helping her to undress, Catherine was watching her. She brushed her hair silently for a few minutes and then, looking at her in the glass, she suddenly said:

"Miss Annie, Mr. Frank is much better than that Marquis who came into your box to-night."

"What connection is there between Mr. Frank and Monsieur d'Anguilhon?" she asked, in a cold, distant way, turning very red.

"None."

Makay was offended and she went on plaiting her young mistress's hair in a vigorous way.

Annie did not ask for any further explanation and her toilette was finished in sulky silence. In order to get rid of Catherine as quickly as possible, she did not make peace with her, but just dismissed her with a curt "Good-night."

In love with the Duchess and it was easy enough for any one to see it! As soon as Annie was alone and in bed, she kept repeating this phrase which had affected her so deeply. With her hands behind her head, her eyebrows knit, and a fixed gaze in her eyes, she made an effort to see for herself. The Marquis certainly seemed to be very intimate with Madame de Blanzac. It was not surprising though, for they had been friends from childhood. He admired her and was very devoted to her, just as the Viscount de Nozay was and indeed all those who came into contact with her. No, there was nothing in his manner to make any one suppose that he was in love, or even that there was any flirtation between them. Then, too, the Duchess was free and rich. If he were in love with her, would he not have married her?

"Clara must have been dreaming," she said to herself, and then Makay's words came back to her mind and troubled her again. For some time, the Marquis had seemed keenly interested in all that she did. He talked to her a great deal, asked her about America and about her friends there. He had said, several times, how sorry he should be when she left and he had begged her to stay until the Duchess and the Keradieus left Paris. She had almost promised to do so and now he was trying to persuade her to spend the summer in Normandy, and he had openly expressed

his hope to meet her there. That evening, at the theatre, he had acted as though Annie had been his own sister or the Duchess herself. And he had kept his eyes fixed on her all the time and it must have looked as though he were saying all sorts of things to her, since Catherine had thought he was making love to her.

How had it all come about? Annie began to examine her own conduct. She had never flirted with the Marquis, as she would not have dared to do so, but she had allowed him to see that she liked him and that his attentions were not disagreeable to her! This was a mistake, as Heaven knew what he had imagined from this. If she stayed on in Paris and then went to Deauville, he would consider that she was encouraging him. Then, too, she would meet him daily, and their intimacy, which was already too great, would increase, and perhaps, in the end, he would propose to her.

This idea, which occurred to her now for the first time, caused her a shock and inspired her with an instinctive dread. Supposing that he did propose! It would be terrible to have to refuse him. Could she refuse him? Annie thought of him with his golden brown eyes and then of the portrait at Versailles, and her heart sank within her.

She must go away at once. That would be the most straightforward course. Monsieur d'Anguilhon would come to America next year, as he had promised, and she would do the honours of New York and introduce him everywhere. Their friendship would not be broken in this way and they would both have pleasant memories. Yes, that was decided. She would just go to Deauville with the Duchess and the Keradieus. That

would pledge her to nothing, but she would not allow herself to be persuaded into renting a villa there and, on the fifteenth, without fail, she would leave Paris.

The heroic resolution did not suffice for restoring Annie's tranquillity of mind. She lay awake until daybreak, torn by conflicting feelings among which was a latent joy.

CHAPTER XV

THE Duchess de Blanzac owned a large Norman cottage at Deauville. It was a delightful abode, with its flower-grown roof, and everything had been arranged in order to give to its inhabitants a sensation of repose, of freshness, and of comfort. Christiane usually spent the months of July, August, and September there. Petit-Port was her favourite residence. She had created it and it was her very own. She felt more at home there than in her own town house in the Rue de Varenne, or than at the Château de Blanzac, which she knew she would have to give up, sooner or later, to her husband's heir.

Christiane was in the habit of going to Normandy, in order to retire from the world, not by any means in a religious sense, but in the sense of an intelligent and idealistic society woman. For the time being, she was then able to dispense with any fashionable style of dress which was inconvenient to wear and also to avoid doubtful friends and uninteresting people. She lived just as she liked when there, outdoors a great deal, and very much alone.

She was neither to be seen at the races, nor at the Casino, but she might be met early in the morning by the seashore, or out in the fields, gathering wild flowers, or driving a dog-cart, escorted by her dogs.

The four spare rooms at Petit-Port were always

occupied. As her uncle, the Count de Creil, was there with her, she was able to invite whom she liked and she only chose people for whom she really cared and whose friendship she had proved.

The Prince de Nolles, Guy de Nozay, and Dr. Moreau were among the favoured few. Count Louis de Challans, her husband's heir, usually spent his holidays at Deauville and Christiane treated him like a younger brother. She appreciated his youth and gaiety and she considered it her duty to watch over him and help him to prepare for the responsible position he would some day hold.

By persuading the three Americans to come to Deauville for the season, the Duchess knew she would have to sacrifice her quiet time, and this was a very real sacrifice. She felt the necessity of keeping Annie a little longer in France and so she did not hesitate. Under the pretext of some repairs, to which she had to attend, she invited the Keradieus and the two girls to go with her to Normandy and the little excursion was arranged.

Annie started with the firm intention of keeping to her decision, but her strength of mind was put to the test. The sight of the sea, which she loved dearly, and the gay beauty of the Norman coast tempted her at once. Christiane took her to visit the Duke of Chilhac-Talbret's villa, which was to let. It was like a nest, in the midst of verdure and flowers. Everything there had been carefully thought out and arranged by a nobleman who was an artist. She also showed her a pretty yacht, the *Sans-Souci,* at anchor in Trouville harbour, and this was also for hire. Monsieur de Keradieu was eloquent in proving to her that the season at Deauville was absolutely

necessary after the Paris season. He held out the most tempting programme. There would be sea-bathing, boating, fishing excursions, races, polo, tennis, and the Casino. Clara was delighted at the prospect of so much gaiety and expressed a great desire to spend a few weeks in Normandy.

Annie was very firm though, and declared, in her most decided tone, that she had had enough entertainment and that she was anxious to continue her travels, without any further delay. Madame de Blanzac fancied that her suspicions had been aroused and so did not insist.

Jacques was informed of all this by the Duchess, so that when Annie told him of her decision, he was prepared. He merely expressed his regret in a polite manner, but his face took such a cold, haughty look that she felt immediately the distance between them, and it gave her a pang.

The following week was one of the most disagreeable ones she had ever spent. In spite of Madame de Keradieu's warning, she had not been able to refrain from flirting a little with the Duke de Randan. The young man, considering that he had been sufficiently encouraged, proposed to her. She, of course, refused him and Guy de Nozay, sympathising with his friend, was very cool to her. The Keradieus were also greatly annoyed with her and the Duchess was the only one who treated her in the same way as before. Like a child in disgrace, Annie accordingly took refuge with her.

Catherine's words had given her a panic, but she gradually recovered from the effect of them and finally persuaded herself that the Marquis had never thought of making love to her. It was only natural that, with

the good friendship that existed between them, he would have liked the idea of meeting her again in Normandy and she was sorry to disappoint him.

Jacques, on his side, had suffered cruelly. He was greatly discouraged to find that Annie preferred going away. He wondered whether it might not be better to risk everything and follow her to England, or whether he would wait till she came to stay with the Keradieus in Touraine, in September. He rather feared the effect of the two months of absence. Then, too, he did not feel capable of enduring the enervating uncertainty for so long a time.

Besides all this, his uncle was still trying to obtain a post for him in the exploring expedition which was being organised, and this might be decided any day.

He would then have to accept or refuse promptly. The Duchess simply told him to wait and let things settle themselves.

In dealing with the destinies of men, Providence sometimes delights in complicating matters and then in arranging everything again, by means of an apparently trivial incident which leads to a decisive result. This proved to be the case for Jacques and Annie.

Mrs. Villars took cold at a little fête, given by one of her countrywomen, on the little island in the Bois de Boulogne. The following day, she was extremely feverish and had all the symptoms of a bad attack of influenza. She was obliged to stay in bed for a fortnight, after which her doctor would not hear of her going to England and prescribed a long stay at the sea. On hearing this, Annie's heart grew lighter and she had a sudden feeling of relief and of great happiness.

When the Marquis called to enquire after Mrs. Villars, as he did every day, Annie informed him of

the change in their plans. He had some difficulty in concealing the joy he felt.

"You must be very much disappointed," he said, rather coldly.

"No, not at all," she answered. "On the contrary, I am delighted to be obliged to spend six weeks more in France."

"Really?"

"Yes, really," answered Annie, with a little laugh that betrayed her emotion.

"So much the better," said Jacques. His features relaxed and the expression Annie liked came once more into his eyes. He held out his hand and she felt that they had made their peace.

CHAPTER XVI

Mrs. Villars, Annie, and Clara had been settled for a month in the Villa de Chilhac-Talbret and the American flag floated, side by side with the French one, on the mast of the *Sans-Souci,* which they had hired for the season.

They had become the centre of a very gay circle, composed of the Keradieus, who were their guests, the Duchess de Blanzac, the Marquis d'Anguilhon, the Viscount de Nozay, Count Louis de Challans, and a few American friends who were staying at Trouville. They gave luncheons, dinners, organised excursions of all kinds and, by their frequent invitations, endeavoured to return all the hospitality they had accepted in Paris. Mrs. Villars was getting gradually stronger again and, during her convalescence, Madame de Keradieu chaperoned the two girls.

In order to be nearer Deauville, Jacques took up his abode at Roches-Noires and contented himself with putting in an appearance every day at La Bluette, the residence of his uncle de Froissy. He spent some hours each day in Annie's company. Life at the seaside, with all the boating, driving, and yachting excursions, helped them to know each other better. They seemed to be irresistibly attracted by each other and they never failed to find themselves together.

The Marquis d'Anguilhon was more seriously in love

than he would have thought possible some little time previously. In society, he had often seen Annie to her disadvantage. Her naturalness and her sincerity had frequently made her appear hard and stiff, whilst her style of dress made her look like a married woman. At Deauville, she was to be seen in a setting that suited her better and he was able to appreciate her both physically and morally. The sun and the out-door life showed up the clearness of her complexion, her limpid eyes, and all the freshness and beauty of her youth. He liked to see her in her simple serge or linen costumes and her sailor hat. During their excursions, he had an opportunity of admiring her coolness and tranquillity in the face of danger. When talking to her, he found sometimes that her matter-of-factness clashed. He could see the limitations of her mind and, over and over again, he realised her inability to enter into the domain of speculative thought and of poetry. He remembered what the Duchess had told him and decided that they would have to carry on their love affairs in prose. He consoled himself with the thought that they would be less likely to strike false notes and to be bored.

It is more difficult for an heiress to make people forget her wealth than for a poor girl to make them forget her poverty. Annie had succeeded in making Jacques forget, so that, at present, he thought less about her money than about her good qualities, and his wish to marry her was as free from any sordid motive as it is humanly possible for such a wish to be.

As to Annie, her face now beamed with the reflection of the divine sentiment. Love had germinated within her and it was a love of the highest kind, simple, devoted, and generous. She gave herself up without any

resistance, scruple, or fear, to this new happiness which had been granted her, and such a fulness of life developed within her, such an inward expansion, that she often said to herself that she had never been so happy. Every morning she woke with the joyful thought that she should soon see the Marquis d'Anguilhon and, every evening, under her closed eyelids, she could see his delicately chiselled profile, his tender gaze, and she had a crowd of delightful impressions. When he was not there, she felt alone. It was as though her mother, Clara, and her other friends no longer existed, as he was responsible now for her joy or sorrow. Like most American women, Annie had, hitherto, had very little reverence for men. She had seen her father a slave to her mother and all the young men she knew had been her most humble and devoted servitors. The Marquis had revealed himself as a master. He had inspired her with respect and this respect had been the beginning of love. In her intercourse with him, she was neither capricious nor coquettish, as she was usually in her flirtations. She consulted his tastes and tried to please him. If she saw that he looked gloomy, she made special efforts to be more pleasant and all this without seeing that she no longer had any will of her own. She was grateful for the most trifling attentions. The simple flowers that Jacques gave her from time to time afforded her much more pleasure than Frank Barnett's costly bouquets. The Marquis had not yet told her in words that he loved her, but he had made her understand that he did. Several times, she had thought he was just going to tell her and then he had suddenly changed the subject of the conversation and she had felt disappointed.

Annie's intercourse with the Marquis d'Anguilhon seemed to be on such strictly friendly lines, that the Keradieus did not guess the truth for a long time. When they did discover how matters stood, they were secretly delighted at their friend's good luck. One fine day, Guy de Nozay suddenly became aware of the same thing, and it literally made his eye-glass drop from its orbit. On discovering that this American girl was in love with his best friend, he felt such keen satisfaction, that he might have been triumphing himself. Mrs. Villars and Clara were the only persons who had no suspicion of the truth. In the first place, Clara believed that the Marquis was in love with the Duchess de Blanzac. Then, too, she was on another false track, for she fancied that they had been invited to Deauville, so that Louis de Challans might have a chance of marrying Annie. She thought she had guessed the secret of the Duchess's friendliness to them and she congratulated herself on her own perspicacity. In order to pay the Duchess back in her own coin, she was specially agreeable to the young man and monopolised him without any difficulty. Meanwhile she was, unconsciously, giving Jacques opportunities of which he did not fail to make use.

An Irishwoman, no matter to what class she may belong, is quick to recognise love, and all the more so when she has been in love herself, as Bonne had. From the very first, she had seen that Annie cared for the Marquis and she had felt sure that her young mistress would marry this Frenchman. She kept thinking of the grief of Annie's two aunts and of Frank Barnett and of all the unpleasant consequences of this marriage. She wondered, with almost maternal anguish, whether this foreigner were really in love

with Annie, or whether her wealth had tempted him. She had watched him when he was talking to her young mistress and had tried to read something from the expression of his face. She had felt somewhat reassured and had said to herself that, at any rate, he "looked like a gentleman." As she felt sure that nothing could save Annie now, she consoled herself by praying for her and committing her to the care of all the saints in Paradise.

Christiane felt that her task was nearly at an end and she was very glad of it. Her nerves seemed overstrained and her humour was beginning to feel the effects of this. She had a great weight on her mind all the time and anguish in the depths of her soul. She attributed all this mental uneasiness to the constant anxiety which Jacques' marriage had caused her and to the irritation she had experienced in not being able to enjoy her beloved Petit-Port in peace, as was her custom. She longed to be alone and had a curious wish to go away and hide herself somewhere. She hoped that when once Jacques and Annie were engaged, they would go away from Deauville. If the engagement took place before the end of August, she would then have a whole month of rest and peace. She had had long talks with Annie and such was her irresistible charm, when she took the trouble to be charming, that, as a result of these talks, she now had great influence with the young girl. She had overcome many of Annie's prejudices about Europeans, and had proved to her that in no other country does the married woman hold as high a position and wield such influence as in France. Christiane told her the history of many of the old families of the Faubourg St. Germain and aroused her curiosity in the aristocracy.

She frequently spoke to her of the Marquis d'Anguilhon and told Annie the flattering things he had said of her. Whenever she touched on this subject, she noticed that the girl was silent and that she had to make an effort in order not to betray her feelings.

One afternoon, Jacques, Monsieur de Keradieu, and Guy de Nozay had gone to the Havre, Madame de Keradieu, Clara, and the Count de Challans on a fishing excursion, and Annie had decided to stay at home. Towards four o'clock, the Duchess de Blanzac called to take her for a drive and she allowed herself to be persuaded. When the horses were on the Trouville road, Christiane said:

"We will call on the Countess de Froissy, as we pass. I want to invite her to luncheon. You will see what a delightful old lady our friend has for a godmother."

Annie's face flushed slightly, but she raised no objection. The idea that she would soon be in the presence of one of Monsieur d'Anguilhon's relatives caused her joy, not unmingled with a certain dread, and she could scarcely listen to the conversation of the Duchess afterwards.

Madame de Froissy was in her garden, tending her plants and shrubs. She received her visitors with evident pleasure and very cordially. After Annie had been introduced and a few commonplaces had been exchanged, they all three walked slowly towards the house.

"I begin to think that you and Monsieur de Froissy are forgetting me. I have not seen you for nearly three weeks," said Christiane.

"Yes, we are getting very old and stay-at-home, but you may be very sure, my dear, that we do not forget

you. We hear news of you, every day, from Jacques. It appears that Petit-Port is very gay this year."

"Ah, when I have girls as neighbours, and American girls, it would be difficult not to be led away," answered the Duchess, looking at Annie. "You see, though, that our dissipations do not prevent my noticing the rareness of your visits. I came to-day, in the first place to scold you and then to ask you if you will come to luncheon to-morrow. I am expecting General de Bussy. He can only spend a few hours at Deauville and I thought you would like to meet him."

"Thanks very much. Henri will certainly accept, but I am sorry to say that I cannot. My sister-in-law has just arrived and I could not leave her alone."

"The Marchioness is here?"

"Yes, she was not to come until next week, but, as my husband was in Paris on business, he brought her back with him. Jacques will be surprised to find her here at dinner-time to-night."

"But I hope that she will give me the pleasure of coming with you to-morrow?"

"Oh, you must not reckon on her, my dear. She is very tired and then, too, she is in great trouble just now. You know what Jacques intends doing?"

"Yes, I only heard of it by chance. I am more grieved then I can tell you, but I cannot blame him."

"Alas, we cannot either. My sister-in-law and I were hoping that Henri would not succeed in getting the post for him, but we have just heard that Jacques' offer is accepted. This expedition to the Upper Niger is to be under the command of a Captain Richard, a man whose past exploits and whose character inspire us with every confidence. We are quite easy on that

score. The expedition will start from Bordeaux at the end of October."

"I am surprised, though, that Monsieur de Froissy should encourage this quixotic madness. It is a great responsibility."

The Countess sighed.

"Ah, you see my husband has adopted modern ideas," she said. "He is indignant to see the young men of our aristocracy contenting themselves with inferior rôles in the world. He only regrets one thing, and that is that a d'Anguilhon cannot pay the expenses of this African expedition. He assures us that Jacques, with his fine constitution, will come back again safe and sound, and that the hardships will make a man of him. All that is possible, and even probable, but his mother and I would prefer seeing him marry and we would rather keep him here just as he is."

"How will his mother bear the separation?" asked Christiane.

"As she has borne so many other trials, with the help of her religion. We shall try and get her to stay with us during her son's absence. Sh—here she is."

Annie had been deeply touched by what she had heard. The sight of the Marchioness coming forward to meet them increased her agitation.

Madame d'Anguilhon kissed the Duchess affectionately and asked after her uncle and some mutual friends. During this time, Annie was observing her with intense curiosity. Jacques' mother was barely fifty-two years of age. Her hair was still thick and waved naturally. She had a high forehead and regular features, of which the outline was bold and would have been somewhat hard, but that the whole face

was softened by magnificent dark eyes, which were very kind and very sad-looking. There was a sort of grandeur about her whole person, an irresistible charm, due to all that is best in the human soul.

The Duchess then introduced Annie, adding that she was a relative of Madame de Keradieu's, that she had been spending the winter in Paris, and that she was now living near, at the Villa de Chilhac.

Madame d'Anguilhon at once held out her hand to Annie.

"My son has often spoken to me of you and your family, Miss Villars, and I am delighted to make your acquaintance."

The colour came into Annie's face and she stammered out a few unintelligible words. Madame d'Anguilhon thought she was timid and endeavoured to put her at her ease. She asked her about her impressions of Europe and questioned her about her own country. The conversation became quite animated and, when Annie felt that the ice was broken between the Marchioness and herself, joy took possession of her and she was intensely happy walking by the side of Jacques' mother and keeping in step with her.

Whilst talking, Annie was observing her and wondering how it came about that she looked so elegant, as it certainly was not owing to her dress. She realised, too, all that Jacques' absence would mean to his mother and, out of sheer pity for her, she felt tempted to say to her: "He will not go, after all."

Madame d'Anguilhon was also observing Annie with increasing interest. She admired her hair, glinting with gold, her clear complexion, her small, brilliant teeth. She was still more attracted by the simple charm that seemed to emanate from her and, already

under the influence of what was going to happen, she said to herself that she liked this girl better than any foreigner she had yet met.

Monsieur de Froissy soon made his appearance and took them all to the verandah. Tea was served there and the conversation soon became general. Annie was not long in feeling at ease with these kindly, courteous people. The Count was most attentive to her, his wife asked her to come again, and Jacques' mother told her that she hoped she would have the pleasure of meeting her again. The agreeable impression she had received during this visit did not in the least console her for the grief which she now felt about Jacques' plan of going to Africa.

On leaving the Villa, Madame de Blanzac proposed that they should walk a little way and, as Annie agreed, she gave orders to the coachman to follow them. For a little time, they were both silent. Christiane was thinking over the dramatic little scene she had just witnessed. She had not arranged it at all and was, in fact, quite innocent. On receiving General de Bussy's letter, the idea had come to her mind, or rather had been put into her mind, to invite Monsieur and Madame de Froissy.

"Are we then inferior beings and have we *no* free-will?" she asked herself. She dismissed the question from her mind and looked at Annie. From the serious, drawn look on the girl's face, she understood that the blow had carried and that she was longing for an opportunity to speak of Jacques.

"What do you think of Madame d'Anguilhon?" asked Christiane, by way of helping her.

"She is very beautiful and very interesting," replied Annie, warmly.

"Oh, she is a *grande dame,* in the full sense of that term. She is as good as any saint. Her son simply adores her. Poor woman, what a grief for her if he should really go!"

"Has the Marquis suddenly thought of this exploration?" asked Annie in an unsteady voice.

"No, he has been thinking of it for about a year."

Annie felt a sudden relief on hearing that the plan dated so far back.

"And—do you approve of it?"

"There is nothing else left for him. You see Monsieur d'Anguilhon is in a cruel situation. Various events and circumstances have deprived him of his patrimony. The Château de Blonay, one of the finest old chateaux in France, was sold by his father. Their house in the Rue de Varenne is heavily mortgaged, so that he only has a very small income. He can neither live according to his rank, nor according to his tastes. I can quite understand that he should prefer dragging himself right away to contemplating his own ruin. If he were to stay in Europe, he would probably put an end to things by shooting himself some day when he felt desperate. He might easily marry for money, of course, as titles are more appreciated than ever, in spite of all people say. A title is a nice thing to have, just like old furniture or Gobelins tapestry, and a woman is more set off by a title than by dress or diamonds. The Marquis could find ten heiresses as easily as one. He prefers risking death, though, in the heart of Africa, to marrying a girl he could not love, or one whose education is inferior to his."

The Duchess suddenly stopped short in the middle of the road.

"Will you allow me to speak to you quite frankly?" she asked, turning to Annie.

She did not wait for a reply, but continued, whilst walking slowly on again.

"Well, ever since I have known you, I have wished that the Marquis d'Anguilhon might marry you."

The Duchess did not say that Annie might marry the Marquis, as she wanted to establish Jacques' superiority.

"He is in love with you, but he cannot make up his mind to propose to you, because he considers that you are too rich. That is absurd, because although you have a large fortune, he has a name that is historical, almost royal, and it would place you in the highest rank of our aristocracy. It really would be the finest marriage imaginable, a good social position, money, and love. There would be all the elements of happiness."

"All? No, not all, for we are not of the same country, nor yet of the same religion."

"Where there is love, there is soon perfect harmony. Look at the Keradieus. Frenchmen of good family, who are well educated and men of principle are the most delightful husbands in the world. They bring into their homes wit, intelligence, a certain idealism, and there is nothing monotonous about them."

"Yes, but they do not take marriage seriously enough," said Annie, betraying the fear which haunted her.

"You mean they are unfaithful," suggested the Duchess, with a smile. "They are not as unfaithful as they pretend to be. The English and Italians hide their sins, but the French boast of theirs and even exaggerate them, thanks to a sort of childish vanity.

I know that Americans are usually model husbands. Many of them, though, drink or have a passion for speculation and simply live for their business. Is not all that worse than unfaithfulness?"

"Nothing could be worse than unfaithfulness," answered Annie, in her most unbending manner.

"How very young you are!" said the Duchess, with a touch of disdain. "To return to Monsieur d'Anguilhon, I am quite sure that he would make you happy. In the first place, he is very much in love with you, and then adversity has mellowed his nature. You would be able to help him to restore his home, to become a useful man, and to do good in the world. As a girl, you have had a brilliant existence, as a wife you would have a still more brilliant life, and in France you might have a most interesting life even. I know that all this would not tempt you, if you did not care for the Marquis, but you do care for him. Is not that so?" asked the Duchess in a lower tone, drawing nearer to Annie.

The girl blushed violently and, completely taken aback by this bold question, could not answer a word.

"I guessed your secret a long time ago," continued Christiane, calmly. "Will you authorise me to give just a hint of encouragement to the Marquis d'Anguilhon?"

"Oh, no, please do not," exclaimed Annie, in distress.

"Well, my dear child, do not let him go away. That is all I have to say on the subject. You would regret it bitterly and all your life long, as you would be an old maid. After him, you could never like another man."

The Duchess suddenly stood still again and said, rather abruptly:

"Let us get in the carriage again now, shall we?"

They finished their drive in silence. Every now and then the Duchess glanced at Annie's face and wondered what she was deciding. Just as the carriage was driving up to the stone steps, in front of the Villa de Chilhac, she laid her hand on Annie's, clasped it gently, and said to her:

"I hope you will soon come and tell me that you are engaged, so that I can congratulate you. It will be soon, will it not? Au revoir," she added, nodding in a friendly way and with a meaning smile.

Annie went straight to her room and, when once she was inside, locked the door.

The Duchess had nailed her down without any warning, and she wanted to think things over. She did care for the Marquis. That was very certain, and she was so much in love that she was neither surprised nor yet rebellious. The Marquis cared for her, though, and this thought made her intensely proud and happy. Her heart sank again when she remembered that he considered her too rich. With his French ideas, he was capable of an exaggerated delicacy and he would, perhaps, decide to go to Africa rather than propose to her.

"Do not let him go," Madame de Blanzac had said. "You would regret it bitterly, and all your life long, as you would be an old maid."

Annie had an instantaneous vision of her two unmarried aunts.

"Heaven preserve me from ending my life like that!" she said, instinctively.

How was she to keep Jacques from going away, she wondered. She could not very well ask him to marry her. She would not have had any difficulty in making

an American man do anything she wanted, but it was quite a different thing with him. However she decided that she would see what she could do. It certainly would be strange, she thought, if she were to marry a descendant of that Seigneur de Blonay, whose portrait had made such an impression on her. In a novel, such a thing would have appeared unlikely. It was only in Europe that such things could happen. Annie then thought of her cousin and a mischievous smile came to her lips. Clara imagined that Monsieur d'Anguilhon was in love with the Duchess and she was religiously watching over the Count de Challans.

The thought of Frank Barnett then crossed the girl's mind and troubled her a little. Poor Frank, what a grief it would be for him! He would, of course, think that she had fallen into one of the traps laid for heiresses. She drew herself up proudly. Monsieur d'Anguilhon was neither a schemer nor an adventurer. No man in the Faubourg St. Germain was of better family. She would be able to introduce this foreign husband of hers in America. How she would be envied! Annie suddenly remembered that the Duchess was a woman quite capable of giving her "little hint of encouragement" to the Marquis, in spite of any injunction. This idea caused her a pang of anxiety at first, but later on she said to herself: "I do not care what happens, provided he does not go away."

CHAPTER XVII

CHRISTIANE was not inventing when she told Annie that the Marquis d'Anguilhon thought her too rich. For some days past, she had been urging him on to propose and he felt himself that he had only to speak now, in order to see his dream realised. His pride, dignity, and self-respect, however, now kept him silent. He had never thought it would be so painful to accept wealth from a woman. His poverty made him feel that he was in an inferior position and this humiliated him profoundly. The idea that, in marrying, he would have to reveal the ruin of his family to outsiders wounded his self-respect. His business transaction with Madame de Lène now caused him a feeling of shame that embittered his triumph. When he met Annie's eyes, full of confidence and admiration, he felt ill at ease and he was sorry not to be the faultless nobleman she believed him to be. Then, too, Jacques belonged to a noble race, a race that had loved danger and glory. The heroism in his nature flamed out at times, so that, even while paying court to Annie, he could not help thinking of the expedition which was being organised. Whenever he saw anything about Africa in the paper, he experienced a painful feeling of shame and regret. At such times, he was tempted to give Annie up and to go and brave death, in order to

conquer something which might add to his heritage of glory. The temptation was only momentary, but it influenced him enough to make him postpone speaking to Annie.

The news of Captain Richard's arrival in Paris, and an urgent letter from the Duchess which he found awaiting him on his return from his uncle's, after hearing there of Annie's visit, were the last touches of the spur given to him by Providence, in order to send him on in the path he was destined to follow.

The next day, Jacques did not put in an appearance at Deauville nor yet at Trouville. He lunched at his uncle's and spent the afternoon with his mother. He then returned to Roches-Noires to dress and dine. Towards nine o'clock, he set out for the Villa de Chilhac, determined to have a definite understanding with Annie.

As she had not seen him all day, she was sure that he would come some time during the evening. She was, therefore, expecting him, with an inward agitation which made her deaf to all that was going on around her. When he appeared, her heart seemed to leap towards him. She could not speak, but she looked full at him, as though to let him read her thoughts. On seeing her emotion, Jacques felt sure that she was fully prepared to hear what he had to say.

He had never seen Annie so pretty and so girlish-looking. She was wearing a white accordion-plaited dress, trimmed with brownish, cream lace, and a narrow waistband of satin ribbon. Round her neck she had small pearls and, in her bodice, a bunch of roses. As it happened every evening, there was a little party of neighbours and friends assembled in the drawing-

room. It was very warm and the long French windows were wide open, so that tea and coffee could be served on the verandah. The Count de Challans was singing a lively song at the piano and Clara was turning over the leaves for him.

After a time, the Marquis managed to get Annie away without much difficulty. They had both become quite skilful in manœuvring, in order to have their little conversations.

There was no sea view from the Villa itself, so that it was necessary to go as far as the terrace, which was separated from the park by a clump of trees and a hedge of witch-elms. The way to this terrace was by two winding paths. It was there that Jacques meant to go to propose to Annie.

"What a happy idea Madame de Blanzac had to take you to La Bluette!" he said, by way of leading up to his subject. "You have quite won my uncle's heart. My mother and aunt think you are rather like Madame de Keradieu. You must take that as a compliment, you know, as they are so fond of her."

"Your mother was most kind to me," said Annie. "If I had known I was going to meet her, I should have been quite frightened——"

"Frightened? But why?"

"I had imagined that she was very proud and very severe."

"You did not get that idea from what you know of her son, I hope?"

"Yes, I did. You are very severe for a young man and fairly authoritative, into the bargain," answered Annie, smiling.

"Because I prevented your going to the Palais-Royal

and to the Neuilly Fair in Paris and because I do not like the *petits chevaux* and the fishing for sand-eels here for you?"

"Oh, and many other things, too. Clara is pretty independent, but she is morally afraid of you. I am too," added Annie, half joking and half seriously.

"If I have appeared authoritative, as you say, it has been because of my interest in you. I did not want you to be criticised or to hear unseemly things in a theatre, nor could I bear the idea of your coming into contact, for a single minute, with a mixed crowd. You are not vexed with me, are you?" asked Jacques, with a very tender look and tone.

"Oh, no," answered Annie, promptly, "I was only joking."

"I am glad of that. I am delighted, too, that my mother did not frighten you and that she liked you so much."

They had just arrived on the terrace, which was beautifully lighted up by the moon. There was silence between them for a moment. The same emotion had taken possession of them both and made them mute. They slackened their pace and Annie rolled the hem of her handkerchief between her fingers. From time to time, she glanced shyly and anxiously at her companion. She was trying to gather courage to say what she had determined to say, but the words remained in her throat. After a few seconds of inward conflict, she managed to overcome her nervousness.

"Is it true that you intend going to Africa with an exploring expedition?" she asked.

Jacques started slightly and a flush came into his face.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"I heard yesterday, at your uncle's. Why did you never say a word to me about it?"

"To talk of such a thing beforehand would be like boasting. I have not mentioned it to any one——"

"And do you very much want to go?"

"I did two months ago—but now——"

"Why not now?"

The Marquis stopped walking. His face was very pale and he was evidently very much agitated.

"Miss Villars," he said, "will you promise to answer very frankly a question I am going to ask you, and to reply independently of your own feelings and of mine?"

"Yes, I promise."

"In your opinion, could a very poor man marry a very rich woman without losing his dignity?"

"Yes, if he had a position to offer her, or if he were ready to work for her and, above all, if he loved her sincerely," answered Annie, unhesitatingly.

Jacques scanned her face for a moment with the light of the moon full upon it and then, in a voice that was muffled by emotion, he said:

"Well, then, Annie, I love you very sincerely and very deeply. On my honour as a gentleman, if you were poor and I had a large fortune, you are the wife I should choose, not merely because you are charming, but because you are so straightforward, and have such a sweet disposition. I have nothing but an old name, of which I am very proud, though, for I value it more than my life. Will you accept it, will you be my wife?"

"Will I? Yes, with all my heart," answered Annie, without any false modesty and with a simplicity that was not without a certain grandeur. Jacques raised

the hand she held out to him to his lips. This kiss, full of the warmth and electricity of love made Annie thrill from head to foot. She was both disturbed and intimidated by this power, the effect of which she had just felt for the first time in her life.

The Marquis took her hand and placed it on his arm.

"Annie," he said, in a very tender voice, "I cannot find words to thank you for this gift of yourself. You shall never regret it, though."

"I am sure I never shall," she replied. "What a fright and what misery I endured yesterday, when I heard that you were thinking of going to Africa."

"Unfortunately I am not valiant enough to prefer glory to happiness," said Jacques, with bitterness and self-disdain. "I am no hero, as you see."

"So much the better. I detest heroes; they always make other people suffer. If you had gone, you would have made your mother wretched."

"And what about you?"

"I should have been wretched, too."

Jacques was deeply touched by this avowal and pressed the hand that lay on his arm.

"You will never doubt my disinterestedness, will you?" he asked.

"Nor you mine?"

"Yours?"

"Yes, are you not going to make a very grand lady of me? People will not fail to say that I wanted a title, and that I am marrying you out of ambition."

"Those who know you will never believe that."

"I hope not, but I must confess that I shall be very proud to be a Marchioness d'Anguilhon."

"Do you know that our family is absolutely

ruined? I am very poor indeed," said Jacques, flushing painfully.

"What does that matter? It is a misfortune and not a fault. It does not lower you in the least."

Just as they reached the end of the terrace, a white form appeared suddenly in front of them and brought them to a standstill. It was Clara and she looked at them in silence for a few seconds.

"Monsieur d'Anguilhon," she exclaimed, "I will never forgive you, never!" She uttered these words in a loud, clear voice and then turned round and disappeared behind the hedge. The engaged couple, who had been taken aback at first, both laughed heartily.

"America protesting already!" said Jacques.

"Let it protest."

"How is it that your cousin never discovered that I was in love with you?"

"She thought you were in love with the Duchess," answered Annie, smiling.

"In love with the Duchess?" repeated Jacques with unfeigned astonishment. "What an idea!"

"Yes, was it not? Oh, I shall have a nice time now with her. She *will* preach."

"And you are not afraid?"

"No, I am very brave."

"Will not your mother object to your marrying a Frenchman?"

"Mother? Oh, she would never think of trying to make me go against my inclinations."

"You cannot think how the idea of proposing to you embarrassed me. It is so contrary to our custom."

"Well, I am very glad that you treated me as an American. If you had spoken first to Mother, you

would have spoilt everything and I should not have had the beautiful memory of this evening."

Annie stopped short and looked straight into Jacques' eyes.

"But what about *your* family?" she asked. "Will not every one be much annoyed with you for choosing a foreigner and a Protestant?"

"No, my mother is very religious, but she is not narrow-minded. Thanks to Madame de Keradieu, she likes and appreciates the American character. In the first place, she will be very grateful to you for keeping me in Europe, and then, she will grow very fond of you, I am sure. I should never have married a woman who was not worthy to be her daughter. Ah, she will be very much surprised, to-morrow, when I ask her for the d'Anguilhon engagement ring, which she still wears on her right hand."

"Is it a blue enamel ring, with initials and a small crown in diamonds?" asked Annie, impulsively.

"Yes, had you noticed it?"

"It fascinated me. I kept looking at it all the time."

"Well, then, to-morrow, I shall put it on this finger," said Jacques, kissing the third finger of Annie's left hand. "I hope it will fit you. It will be the first link in the chain that is to bind us together. I hope it will be a pleasant chain, do you think it will?"

Annie was too deeply moved to be able to speak. She nodded her head silently.

Jacques took her to the edge of the terrace.

"What a beautiful evening for our engagement!" he said. "Just look—" The sea lay before them, stretching out towards the horizon like a sheet of light. The warm, golden August moon was rising

slowly in the dark sky. The atmosphere was of extraordinary transparence. There was not a breath of wind stirring and the whole landscape seemed to be enchanted and idealised.

"How very beautiful!" murmured Annie, "a never-to-be-forgotten scene."

"Do you know the name of the roses you are wearing?" asked Jacques.

"No."

"The 'bride's roses.' You were certainly inspired in choosing them for this evening."

"Well, I chose them, because I had heard you say you liked them."

"I do. There used to be a whole clump of them in a corner of the garden at Blonay and they were my admiration as a child. I used to cool my face with them, when I was warm after racing about and their scent was delicious. They will now be doubly dear to me. Will you give me a few of them as a keepsake?"

Annie took the bunch from her dress and, with trembling fingers, divided it into two.

"There, take one half and I will keep the other."

Jacques took the little roses, clasping the hand that offered them in his for a moment.

"The bride's roses," he said, kissing them before he put them away in his pocket-book.

Just at this moment they heard voices.

"I think we must go in," said Annie, "or we shall be missed. I shall see you again to-morrow."

"And every day—always," answered Jacques.

They clasped hands again and then walked slowly back to the house. When they reappeared, Madame de Keradieu and Guy de Nozay looked at them with a certain curiosity. Annie was careful to avoid look-

ing at Clara. She whispered to her mother that she had a headache and asked her to excuse her to their friends. She then slipped quietly away to her room.

Catherine was there when she entered and Annie threw her arms round her old nurse's neck and hugged and kissed her.

"Oh, I am so happy!" she exclaimed, with a beaming face.

Catherine released herself and then stood back and looked attentively at her young mistress.

"You do not mean that you are engaged?"

"I do, though."

"Oh, Miss Annie, Miss Annie!"

Poor Catherine sank down on a chair, overwhelmed with consternation.

"Had you guessed then?"

"Guessed that you were in love with this French Marquis? Oh, yes, long enough ago, ever since the first time I saw you together. And you were so changed, never two hours in the same mood, never satisfied with your hair and your dress, always absent-minded. All that was a sure sign. Oh, you have been a worry to me!"

"I little thought I was so disagreeable," said Annie, laughing. "Ah, you will see how nice I shall be again!"

"And this evening," continued Makay, "I was in your mother's room and I saw him taking you off to the terrace. It made my heart stand still, for I guessed what was going to happen."

"So much the better, or you might have fainted with the shock now."

"How can you joke about it, Miss Annie?" said Catherine, reproachfully.

"And how can you look so wretched when you see me happy? You have often told me that I have no feeling. I tell you now that I am in love and still you are not satisfied. Come now, is not Monsieur d'Anguilhon very handsome?"

"Yes, but what about his character and his morals? Are you sure about all that?"

"He is a gentleman, Catherine."

"Your poor aunts will be heart-broken."

"Would you like me to sacrifice my love and my own happiness for their sake? Do you want me to be an old maid?"

"No, no, my child——"

"Well, then, do not grumble any more and put off that tragic look."

"Yes, but have you really thought it over?" began Catherine again.

"No, I have not. I liked the Marquis d'Anguilhon the first time I saw him. He attracted me and I fell in love with him. I am *quite* in love with him now."

"Does Miss Clara know?"

Annie began to laugh.

"She came to the terrace and saw us arm in arm, so she guessed. She will be coming soon to make a scene, but I am ready for her."

"Miss Annie," said Catherine, anxiously, getting up from her seat, "you will not send me back to America, will you?"

"Send you back to America? Have you gone mad? Do you suppose I could do without you? No, Catherine, we will never part—unless, of course, you were to take a dislike to my husband."

"Oh, if he makes you happy, I shall be sure to like him."

"You will adore him. And now you can go. I will undress alone."

Annie threw her arms again round Catherine's neck.

"Now go and have a little cry," she said. "I know you, and you will not be right again until you have wept a few tears."

"God bless you, my darling," murmured Catherine as she went away.

"There, I have settled one," said Annie, gaily. She then threw herself down on the divan and tried to live again the delightful scene that had just taken place. She recalled all Jacques' words, his looks, and his emotion. At a certain moment, she had felt his heart beat against her arm. Oh, yes, he was absolutely sincere, she said to herself and she could never doubt him. He must really be in love with her, or he would never choose her for the Marchioness d'Anguilhon. After spending more than an hour recalling every incident of the evening and thinking over her present and future happiness, Annie took the roses from her dress and placed them in a valuable little old box which she had bought a few days previously. She then took her rings off and smiled happily as she thought that the very next day Jacques would put the engagement ring belonging to the Anguilhon family on her finger, that beautiful, blue enamel ring which, to use her own expression, had fascinated her.

CHAPTER XVIII

CLARA would never have been able to sleep that night, if she had not gone first to free her mind of the anger and indignation she had felt on seeing her cousin arm in arm with the Marquis d'Anguilhon. She went to Annie's room as soon as she could escape and overwhelmed her with reproaches, accusing her of duplicity, hypocrisy, and everything else that was bad. She was particularly exasperated herself at the idea that, after coming to Europe specially to watch over Annie, she should have seen nothing of what was going on. Her wounded vanity made her positively abominable.

Annie endured everything admirably as long as her cousin only blamed her, but when she attacked the Marquis and cast doubts on his sincerity, Jacques' *fiancée* requested her to be silent on the subject.

"Once for all," she said, with great dignity, "I will not listen to anything you have to say either about my wealth or Monsieur d'Anguilhon's poverty. I believe that his affection for me is disinterested, because he says that it is. If he has deceived me, so much the worse for him. I am engaged to him and all that you say against him hurts me."

Clara then reproached her cousin for deserting her friends and her country. Annie replied that New York was only a week's journey from Paris.

"A week's journey," repeated Clara, shrugging her shoulders. "When once you are married to a Frenchman, it will be a journey of years. Remember what I say. You will not be able to shut up your house and your château to go and see your family. Your social position will create a thousand obligations for you that will make you a prisoner——"

"A prisoner!" said Annie, laughing. She then assured her cousin that she would never be made a prisoner by any one or anything and she promised to be present at her wedding at all costs. She then tried to show her the pleasant side of things, but Clara would not listen.

Just at this moment, Mrs. Villars came into the room and her niece, still furious, told her the news bluntly without any preparation whatever. The poor woman was perfectly bewildered by it. Her daughter engaged to Monsieur d'Anguilhon! It took her some time to really believe it, as she was convinced that it was just a joke. When once she recovered from her surprise, she blamed Annie for her dissimulation. It was that which hurt her more than all the rest.

"How could you hide from me what was going on between yourself and the Marquis?" she asked with an expression of severity on her face such as Annie had never seen there before.

"But nothing has been going on, Mother," answered her daughter, promptly. "He has never spoken to me of love or marriage until this evening. We have always talked together as friends. We have never flirted at all. As to what I felt for him, it was all too vague at first and then too sacred to talk about."

Mrs. Villars understood at once that Annie must be very much in love with the Marquis to decide to

marry him like this. She made no attempt to fight against this love and to make her daughter listen to reason, but she let her see her grief and disappointment. She also declared that she would not give her consent until she had made very full inquiries about Monsieur d'Anguilhon.

Madame de Keradieu, hearing voices in Annie's room, came to see what was going on. She stopped short at the door, surprised and alarmed at the consternation depicted on the faces of Mrs. Villars and Clara. Annie advanced to meet her, threw her arms round her neck, and whispered to her that she was engaged to Jacques.

Madame de Keradieu uttered an exclamation of joy and congratulated her with a sincerity that came straight from her heart.

"You might have gone a very long way without meeting a man as good as the Marquis d'Anguilhon," she said.

"She had only to stay in America for that," put in Clara, drily.

"Well, I do not think so."

"Yes, of course, I understand. His family, his title—" said Clara, disdainfully, "all that is useless and often interferes with real happiness."

"Well, they are things which may contribute to make life agreeable," replied Madame de Keradieu, calmly. "You can be quite easy in your mind," she added, turning to Mrs. Villars. "Jacques is a thorough gentleman and my husband will give you all the information you will want about him and his family."

She then said all she could to reconcile Mrs. Villars and Clara to the idea of this marriage, but she felt that their disappointment was too recent and too keen

at present and that it would be better to leave time and reflection to do their work. They all separated for the night on fairly good terms. Mrs. Villars promised not to oppose her daughter's choice, provided the result of her inquiries should be satisfactory, and Clara gave her word to be, at any rate, polite to the Marquis. Annie could not reasonably expect more than this.

CHAPTER XIX

JACQUES' first thought was to go and see the Duchess. He took leave of Mrs. Villars, almost as soon as Annie went away and, with a joyful heart, he made his way to Petit-Port.

Christiane had felt sure that his fate would be decided that day. She guessed that he would choose the evening for proposing to Annie and that he would come and tell her the result immediately.

Ever since the evening before, her mind had been full of the most painful anxiety and she had had a constant pang at her heart. She had gone for a long walk of some three hours and had tried everything in order to forget Jacques and Annie for a time, but all in vain. After dinner she had insisted on Guy de Nozay and Louis de Challans going to Mrs. Villars', but, unable to rest herself, she had strolled up and down the verandah with her uncle and Dr. Moreau.

When the Marquis d'Anguilhon was announced, she went back to the drawing-room, stopped a second in the doorway to note the expression of his face, and then advanced quickly towards him.

"You look triumphant," she said, as she held out her hand to him.

"I feel simply a happy man," he answered.

The Duchess had the sensation of a violent blow, of

a wound that she had just received. Her eyelids drooped for a second and the reflection of deep emotion swept over her face.

"Ah!" she said.

Her voice had such a strange intonation that Jacques looked at her in surprise.

She sat down in her large arm-chair; the shade of a lamp placed near her on a small table slightly hid her face and just a few seconds sufficed for her to regain her self-possession.

"And so you are engaged?" she said, in a more natural tone of voice, opening her fan.

"Very much engaged," replied Jacques.

"Did you receive my little note yesterday?"

"Yes, and as you see, I obeyed you."

"And you were quite right. With women, there is a moment for which you must wait, but you must never let it go by. That moment had just arrived with Miss Villars. And then, too, I was rather afraid that the romantic idea to go and gather a few laurel leaves in Africa before marrying might tempt you."

"You judge me too highly," said Jacques, colouring slightly. "I am incapable of such a thing, unfortunately."

"You had thought of it, though. Oh, I can read your face very easily."

"Ah, comfortable for me, that!"

"And how did things go off? I suppose you were very eloquent?" said the Duchess.

The jesting note in this question did not escape Jacques and it hurt his feelings.

"I was sincere," he replied, coldly. "As to Miss Villars, she accepted me in an impulsive, generous-

hearted way and with such absolute trust as I shall never forget."

"What a surprise it will be for your mother! The bare idea of your departure had made her pale and thin. She will come to life again now."

"Only fancy, that she was delighted with Annie. She asked me no end of questions about her and watched me in a curious way all the time. I should not be surprised if she had guessed. She has such intuition."

"And now you must not loiter. The wedding ought to be at the end of October."

"The end of October? Do you think so? They might think that my eagerness had some interested motive."

"A man's eagerness in such cases is always flattering. I have faith in Annie's word and in her strength of character, but all the same, I shall not be easy in my mind until I see you coming out of the St. Clotilde Church—and I really need peace and tranquillity," added the Duchess, in a tone that again surprised Jacques.

"Are you so anxious to get rid of me?" he asked.

"Of you, no, but of the anxiety of your marriage. I do not mean to reproach you, of course, but for nearly four months I have had it on my mind all the time, and I really need a change of thought."

"What is the matter with you this evening?" asked Jacques, stung to the quick. "I have never seen you like this before. Have I done anything that has vexed you?"

"No, nothing of the kind. I have been for a ridiculously long walk and am simply worn out with fatigue,

and the heat makes me nervous. I shall send you away very soon."

"Already? And I have so many things to talk to you about."

"To-morrow I will listen to everything. We will talk as long as ever you like," said Christiane, with a gentler inflection in her voice. "In the meantime, I congratulate you sincerely. You will not only have money, but a good, straightforward and very agreeable wife."

"And how ever am I to thank you for helping me?"

"By doing all the good you can."

"That I will endeavour to do."

"Good-bye, then, for this evening," said the Duchess with one of her most charming smiles.

Dismissed in this way, Jacques went away feeling very much annoyed and disappointed. He was by no means as happy as when he had arrived.

"What a strange woman she is!" he said to himself. "One never knows in what mood one will find her. Thank Heaven, Annie has not such a complex nature!"

After he had gone away, Christiane remained for some little time motionless, with a fixed look in her eyes, but seeing nothing of the things around her. She was surprised that she should suffer and she began to try to discover the cause of this grief which had suddenly made itself felt within her.

"Am I envious?" she asked herself, but her lips curled scornfully at this idea. "What is it then?" she asked herself again.

The sudden appearance of a phantom would not have made her face turn more pale nor have given a more awe-struck expression to her eyes than what she saw in the depths of her heart.

"What madness!" she exclaimed aloud and, taking her handkerchief, she wiped the cold perspiration from her forehead, murmuring to herself, as she did so:

"Impossible, impossible!"

CHAPTER XX

THE following day, after sending Annie her first *fiancée's* bouquet, together with a few charming lines, Jacques set out for his uncle's house. The nearer he approached, the more slowly he walked. Up to the present moment, he thought he had done well in not saying to his mother anything about his idea of marrying. He realised though, now, that in proposing to Annie, without first obtaining his mother's approval, he had done a thing that was unheard of, absolutely without precedent in his family, and it was not without a certain apprehension that he entered the house.

Madame d'Anguilhon was in a small drawing-room, leading out of her own bedroom, writing letters. On seeing her son, her face lighted up, as usual, with joy.

"You?" she exclaimed. "I did not expect you this morning."

Jacques' heart began to beat more quickly. He kissed his mother very tenderly and then, putting his arm through hers, led her to her armchair and, when she was once seated, put a cushion under her feet and knelt down on it himself. He took her hands in his and, looking up at her, with eyes full of triumph and affection, he told her all.

The Marchioness was both surprised and displeased. She was very much hurt that her son had not taken her into his confidence and above all that he had not

consulted her. Jacques tried to excuse himself by telling her that he had acted in this way merely to spare her the anxiety and suspense which he himself had experienced. He told her that if he had taken the decisive step without asking for her approval first, it was because he was sure of it. He told her all that he knew about the Villars family and spoke of Annie's good qualities, enumerating all the promises of happiness that this marriage with her gave him.

As she listened to her son, the expression of Madame d'Anguilhon's face gradually became more serene. The idea that he would not leave her suddenly dawned on her and filled her heart with joy. The tears then came into her eyes.

"It would all be perfect," she said, "if only Miss Villars were not a foreigner and a Protestant."

"Yes, she is a foreigner and a Protestant, not an aristocrat, but a republican," replied Jacques, "and yet she is not *bourgeoise.* She has no stupid vanity and no petty likes and dislikes. She is well-bred and will suit herself to her new surroundings perfectly. Our race wants building up," he continued. "Annie has a splendid constitution. She will have fine children, such children as are born of these Franco-American marriages, children that are well built, with golden hair, and well-set eyes. I fancy I can see them already," said Jacques with emotion.

The Marchioness thought Annie's dowry too large.

"For a poor man to accept so large a fortune," she said, "he ought to be very much in love with the woman and he ought to esteem her very highly."

"I do love and esteem Annie very much indeed," answered Jacques.

"And then, too, remember," said his mother, "that

the world, indulgent as it usually is towards masculine unfaithfulness, despises the man who is unfaithful to the woman who has brought him money. I would rather you went out to Africa and died there than see you wrong this girl, for she is not only bringing you a royal fortune, but sacrificing many things for your sake. The Anguilhons have never kept their marriage vow. You must be the exception and prove yourself a faithful husband. Give me your word of honour that you will never allow yourself to be led away in this respect. I consent only on this condition."

"I give you my word of honour," said Jacques, in a firm tone of voice.

"Then may God bless you," said the Marchioness, laying her hand on her son's head.

She then took from her finger the enamel ring she was wearing and gave it to him.

"Here is your engagement ring," she said, in an altered voice. "Your father gave it to me thirty-two years ago. May it bring happiness to Miss Villars."

The Marchioness looked at her son for a few seconds in silence.

"And to think," she said at last, gently, "that there are people who believe that God no longer works miracles!"

It would be difficult to translate into words the joy of the Countess de Froissy on hearing of her nephew's engagement. Her husband blamed Jacques severely for allowing him to take steps for obtaining a post for him in the expedition to Africa, when he intended all the time to marry an heiress.

Jacques explained that he had wanted to keep this African expedition as a consolation to fall back upon in case he were refused.

"But," he added, smiling, "you see that the old proverb is true and there will always be 'love, glory, and money for a d'Anguilhon.'"

"Glory!" repeated Monsieur de Froissy, "where does that come in?"

"It will perhaps come like the rest," answered Jacques.

Monsieur de Froissy shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "I am glad about this marriage for your mother's sake and I only hope you will make good use of this money which is coming to you so unexpectedly from America. But remember," he added, "for the sake of your own honour and ours, let there be no heavy gambling at your club, no freaks, and no follies!"

CHAPTER XXI

Monsieur de Keradieu satisfied Annie's mother by declaring that he would answer for Jacques as for himself. She knew him too well to doubt his good faith in saying this. Jacques then asked Mrs. Villars officially for Annie's hand and his request was granted, but God alone knew with what regret.

The announcement of the Marquis d'Anguilhon's approaching marriage with the wealthy American girl, who had been so much talked about the previous season, caused general surprise. It was quite a society event and was discussed in all the châteaux in France. Envious people blamed him for leaping so lightly over the *bâton de la mésalliance,* as it was styled in eighteenth-century language. Conservatively inclined individuals did not fail to deplore, as they do at every fresh Franco-American marriage, the invasion of the aristocracy by foreigners. As Jacques and his mother were generally liked though, there was a certain amount of sincerity in the congratulations they received.

On the day after her engagement, Annie wrote to her two aunts to tell them of her approaching marriage. As she felt perfectly free to do as she liked, she did not attempt to beat about the bush or to soften the blow for them. She found words to express her deep feeling in the matter very briefly and to make

them understand that all remonstrance would be in vain. She wrote straight off, without the slightest hesitation or regret, only stopping, from time to time, to look at the Anguilhon ring on her finger, the initials and crown of which gave her the sensation of the tie which now existed between Jacques and herself. She enclosed his photograph in her letter, hoping that the sight of this handsome nobleman might appease the wrath of her aunts and justify her choice. By the same post, she sent a letter to Mr. Barnett's sister, which was really intended for Frank himself, and this letter was not an easy one to write. Like all women, though, in similar circumstances, Annie found a way to ease her own conscience, although it might not serve to lessen the grief that she would cause.

Jacques' first care was to free his mind of everything relating to the African expedition. He wrote to George Delorme telling him faithfully the story of his engagement and the struggle he had had with himself. After this, wishing as far as possible to soften the bad effect of his desertion, he went to Paris to see Captain Richard, who had just arrived there. The sight of the young explorer's bronzed face, his muscular body, so thin after all he had gone through, and his eyes shining with the light of conviction and enthusiasm, gave Jacques a thrill of envy. Feeling keen sympathy with him, and not wanting to be too severely judged, he explained very frankly his position.

Captain Richard expressed his regret at losing his collaboration, but congratulated him warmly and added:

"Any one would have done the same, under the circumstances."

These words, uttered without the slightest intention of hurting Jacques' feelings, brought the blood to his face just as a blow might have done. A d'Anguilhon ought not to have acted as every one might have done, he said to himself.

After this duty had been discharged, though, he felt more free and gave himself up, heart and soul, to the happiness which had been allotted to him.

Annie was intensely happy, and happy because she herself was in love. All the chords of her heart vibrated now, even those of devotion and self-sacrifice, chords which no man had hitherto succeeded in touching. The idea that she was going to restore to Jacques the wealth of which he had been deprived filled her with joy, and the various sacrifices she kept making to his will or to his taste gave her exquisite pleasure. Then, too, besides her own great happiness, there were a hundred little details which caused her pleasure. Her French friends, old and young alike, were delighted about this marriage. Guy de Nozay was quietly triumphant and showed her the most cordial friendship. The Duchess no longer treated her as a foreigner, but as an equal, and this flattered her. The affectionate welcome with which she was always greeted at La Bluette made her feel proud, and she liked the Marchioness d'Anguilhon better after every visit.

According to American custom, Mrs. Villars left the engaged couple absolute liberty. Far from watching over them, which she would have deemed offensive for her daughter, she always withdrew discreetly when she found them either in the library or drawing-room. Jacques was, at first, somewhat disconcerted by this extraordinary confidence. Annie was so simple though and so reserved always, when they were alone, that

he never dreamed of being otherwise himself than most scrupulously correct.

In the course of their conversation, Annie told him of the extraordinary effect that the Versailles portrait had produced on her, and Jacques was amazed to hear in what a curious way she had first become interested in him.

To the great consternation of her mother and cousin, Annie consented to the date of the wedding being fixed for the 25th of October. Mrs. Villars was quite alarmed at the thought of her daughter being married in a foreign country, but the Keradieus promised to help her with everything and to return to Paris early in October.

On the 2nd of September, the Marchioness d'Anguilhon and her son and the three American women left Deauville.

. . . . . .

When Annie entered her bedroom again at the Hôtel de Castiglione, Catherine, who was just behind her, exclaimed:

"Oh, Miss Annie, who would have thought it!"

"Yes, indeed. Who would have thought that I should come back here engaged!"

And in an effusion of sudden joy, she threw her arms round her nurse's neck and kissed her.

CHAPTER XXII

Two months was rather a short time for all the necessary preparations for the wedding. Legal papers had to be obtained from New York, business matters had to be settled, and Annie's trousseau ordered.

Every morning, after receiving her flowers from Jacques, she would set out with her mother and Clara, and the whole day would be spent in shopping and at the dressmaker's. All this entertained Mrs. Villars more than it did the two girls.

The approach of her wedding-day is always a time of great excitement for the French girl. She experiences, at this moment of her life, all kinds of fresh sensations and of delightful emotions. The thought that she is about to become a married woman, that she will have diamonds, lace, cambric or silk linen, that she will be able to wear the pretty dressing-gowns and tea-gowns for which she has longed, and altogether the prospect of being free at last—all this causes her such delight as an American girl can never know, accustomed as she has always been to every luxury and having already tasted much of what life has to offer.

Annie prepared for her wedding as though it had been that of another person. She was so busy that she had not time to realise that she was alive and she certainly had no time for thought. Now and again,

when it flashed upon her that she was about to become Jacques' wife, she was almost frightened. The thought of it was both sweet and terrible to her. She adored him, but, strangely enough, she could not get used to him. The innate haughtiness of his character and the difference of race and language seemed to place him, as it were, at a certain distance from her. He appeared to her as a being full of secrets and mysteries. The thought that he would be her husband, just as her father had been the husband of her mother, disturbed her mind so much that she refrained from dwelling on it.

Annie went to see Madame d'Anguilhon frequently. She had never, hitherto, asked the advice of any one, but she was glad now to have the opinion of her *fiancé's* mother constantly. On this foreign soil, her footing was not firm and she felt instinctively the need of a guide. When she arrived at Madame d'Anguilhon's in the Rue de Bellechasse, with her hands full of flowers, the Marchioness felt that she was like a vision of youth and hope, in her elegant dress, with her dazzling complexion, and her hair glinting with gold. The old Faubourg St. Germain dwelling delighted Annie. A curious feeling of comfort came over her and a sensation of tranquillity. It was as though she had suddenly been transported hundreds of leagues from Paris and from modern life. The old tapestry and the antique furniture appealed to her and made her feel something of the charm of the past.

As she had expected, Annie received letters full of sharp reproach from her aunts and also from her lawyer, who had been her father's friend and was now her guardian. She read them with a little defiant smile, deliberately passing over the parts which she

saw contained insinuations against Jacques. The reply from Frank Barnett's sister disturbed her mind much more than the other letters. Mrs. Adair told her very simply that her brother had not been surprised, as he had been expecting this for some time. He sent her his sincere good wishes for her future happiness. This was heaping coals of fire on her head, but she was too happy to feel them much.

Jacques had intended selling the tapestry and pictures he still had, in order to pay back to Madame de Lène the sum she had advanced and also the amount he had undertaken to pay her. Monsieur de Froissy, imagining that his nephew's financial circumstances were probably not very brilliant just now, handed him a wedding present of two hundred thousand francs. Jacques could not help smiling to himself as he thought of the old proverb that Fortune always favours the happy people. Madame de Froissy had bought in a great deal of the Anguilhon jewellery and she now presented it all to her nephew.

Although Annie was marrying a very poor nobleman, she would nevertheless have a wonderful diamond necklace, laces fit for a queen, fans, and other valuable objects which had been royal presents. She could not help feeling very proud of this and it even inspired Clara with a certain amount of respect.

When it came to the question of the contract, Annie wanted to know the French law. She had several interviews with the family lawyer of the Marchioness, who for the first time in his life, and to his great amazement, had to explain the French code to a girl. When she had thoroughly understood, Annie announced that she preferred being married under the proviso that she and her husband had joint possession

of all the money they had between them, as she considered that this was the only way of maintaining their mutual dignity. The American lawyer pointed out to her the fact that she risked being ruined in this way, and her mother beseeched her not to give such power to her husband. Jacques himself opposed this act of generosity, but Annie was as firm as a rock.

Thanks to the young girl's promptness and activity, to the help of the Keradieus, to the transatlantic cable, and to a plentiful supply of money, everything was ready for the day appointed.

On the evening before the wedding, Jacques was walking under the arcades up and down the Rue de Castiglione with Henri de Keradieu. They were discussing the arrangements for the following day.

"Tell me," said Jacques, suddenly breaking off, "was your wife as calm as Annie?"

The Baron laughed.

"Quite as calm," he answered, "and I was just as astonished as you are. We French people are absurd," he continued. "We marry foreigners, but we expect them to be just like French girls."

"I do not want that, but I must own that Annie's coolness astounds me, and all the more so as I am told that American girls are not by any means, morally speaking, *ingénues*."

"No, it is very probable that Miss Villars knows life's secret. She is too pure-minded though to talk of it in all its ugliness or beauty. I expect she simply wonders whether marriage will be pleasant or unpleasant."

"She has attended to every detail of the wedding ceremony. I verily believe she will know, to a sou, how much it has cost."

"I am sure she would know that. Just think that from the age of eighteen, she has been virtually her own mistress. She has paid for her dresses and all her personal expenses, so that she knows exactly how much everything costs. An American woman, you know, may give a million away to a friend or to some charity, but she would not allow a tradesman to charge her ten francs too much for anything. I do not know of any woman who has such a horror of being deceived. You may be quite sure of one thing though. Miss Villars loves you more than anybody or anything in this world and she has never loved any one but you. Can you take a piece of good advice and profit by my experience?"

"I fancy I can."

"Well, then, get into the way of talking English with Annie. That magnificent language, which neither lends itself to exaggeration nor to sentimentality, will give you the key to her character. Then go and spend a few months in the United States. America will strengthen your nature and Europe will soften Annie's and you will finally arrive at as perfect a union as that which exists between Antoinette and me."

"Amen," said Jacques, speaking from the bottom of his heart.

CHAPTER XXIII

On the 25th of October, at eight o'clock in the morning, Catherine went into Annie's room and woke her gently.

"For the last time, my dear," she said, giving her her cup of coffee and laying a magnificent spray of roses on the bed.

"Why for the last time?" asked Annie thoughtlessly.

"Why? Oh, Miss Annie, how can you ask that?"

A deep flush suffused the girl's face, her hand trembled slightly, and she lay for a few seconds without speaking and with eyelids lowered.

"Yes, it is true," she said at last, handing her cup back to Catherine. "My life will be changed. In spite of my wedding yesterday at the Mairie and at the Consulate, I cannot realise that I am actually the Marchioness d'Anguilhon."

"I realise it, though, only too well," said Catherine, with a sigh.

"Oh, now do not begin to whimper, please. As you have so foolishly accustomed me to this cup of coffee, you shall bring me one every morning to my dressing-room and, whenever you feel inclined, you can bring me some flowers too," added Annie, smelling the roses in delight.

"You are an angel," said Catherine, looking radiant.

Annie kissed her faithful friend affectionately and then pushed her gently away.

"Now, we must not both begin to cry," she said, "it is most silly. You are always suggesting tearful ideas," she added drolly. "I must not have a red nose and swollen eyes to-day. I want to do honour to Monsieur d'Anguilhon and to America too. Just think how I am going to be stared at, picked to pieces, and criticised."

Just at this moment, the two doors leading into Annie's room were opened simultaneously.

"It is fine weather," announced Mrs. Villars.

"It is a fine day, Annie," exclaimed Clara.

"So much the better," she answered, clapping her hands. "'Happy the bride whom the sun shines on'!"

. . . . . .

A few hours later, the big doors of St. Clotilde's Church were opened for Annie to pass. The Church was as full as though it were a special fête day. The triumphal notes of a wedding march pealed forth under the arches, and the bride, looking very pretty in her white satin dress and tulle veil of marvellously fine texture, walked up the aisle on the arm of the Ambassador of the United States. Her head was very erect and her eyes were fixed on the chancel, which, with its gildings, its light, and flowers looked like a corner of Paradise.

On arriving in front of the high altar, Jacques bowed low. Annie, with a little touch of her finger, adjusted one of her sleeves which she saw was slightly turned round. An American would not fail to do that if she were on her way to the scaffold.

The Marchioness d'Anguilhon had asked Monseigneur Mermillod, the Bishop of Geneva, to come and pronounce his benediction at her son's wedding. The

Bishop, with his golden voice and his poetical temperament, gave one of his most charming addresses. After briefly referring to the early history of the Anguilhons, and speaking of their brilliant deeds which had won for them a prominent place in the history of their country, he exhorted the Marquis to prove himself worthy of his race, adding that he owed constancy and affection to the woman who was about to say to him as Ruth said to Naomi. "Thy God shall be my God, and thy country my country." Monseigneur Mermillod then said to the bride that she came from a country in which Catholicism was making rapid progress, from a country that was fertilised by the sun of liberty, and that she ought to employ the forces she brought from it in good works. He added that every Marchioness d'Anguilhon had been a faithful wife, and a perfect Christian woman, and that she should endeavour to equal them all in moral grandeur in order to leave behind her, as they had all done, a memory that was respected and reverenced.

A French girl would probably have only heard in these words a fine piece of oratory. They penetrated to Annie's very soul and Jacques, who was watching her furtively, was very much struck by the serious expression of her face.

During the Mass, Annie was conscientiously reading the marriage service in her English Protestant prayer-book. And it was to be thus throughout her life. She would speak a different language from that of her husband, she would love in another way, and would follow a parallel but different route and would never be in perfect communion with him.

When Jacques felt Annie leaning on his arm, he experienced a triumphant joy and the deepest emotion.

The curiosity of the crowd made him inwardly gnash his teeth. He would have given a great deal to be able to escape from it and from the customary congratulations.

An endless stream of people came into the vestry, as friends from the most distant châteaux were there. The women, always more or less affected by the marriage ceremony, congratulated the bride and bridegroom. The men, with their hats on the ends of their sticks and their eyes rather brighter than usual, paid compliments and made pretty speeches, as they moved about among the crowd of well-dressed women. Impressions and criticisms were exchanged on every side.

"What do you think of the new Marchioness?" the Count de Bar asked one of his friends.

"Pretty, but rather stiff," was the reply.

"Jacques will put her right. He has no equal for training a horse or a woman."

"What a time he will have with sixty millions to handle!"

"These American women do not deny themselves any luxuries. Miss Villars is buying one of our oldest names."

"Yes, but she is giving a good price for it."

"Where are they going for the honeymoon?"

"To Cannes, to the Count de Froissy's place, the Château de St. Michel."

"Well, Jacques will have a good time at the Château de St. Michel, I should think," said the Count de Bar.

A little farther away, two American girls were making their comments.

"Annie's dress is too simple," said one of them.

"I expect she wanted to look as though she really

belonged to the Faubourg St. Germain," observed the other one.

"What do you think of the Marquis?"

"I never saw such a handsome Frenchman."

"How mad her aunts will be to see Annie marrying a poverty-stricken nobleman, just as though she were a *parvenue!*"

"Yes, but then she is not marrying him for his title. She is over head and ears in love with him."

"I do not wonder."

"Why is there no reception, this afternoon, at the hotel where Mrs. Villars is staying?"

"The Marquis did not like the idea of it."

"He looks horribly proud. I expect he will forbid Annie seeing her old friends."

"Oh, she will hold her own. She is not a Villars for nothing."

"It must be very exciting to marry a foreigner."

"Yes, it must be great fun."

And with these characteristic remarks, the two girls passed on into the vestry, in order to see the Marquis more closely, so that they could describe him in their letters.

The wedding-breakfast was given at the Hôtel de Castiglione and only a few intimate friends were present.

The table, strewn with rare flowers, and the guests in their beautiful dresses, formed a pretty picture.

Madame d'Anguilhon, now the Dowager Marchioness, seemed to have grown younger, thanks to her son's happiness. Mrs. Villars, with her delicate features and her white hair, looked like a living Nattier.

The repast was charming. Clara was no more reconciled to her cousin's marriage than she had been

at first, but she endeavoured to put a good face on the matter. She appeared to be very gay, but those who knew her were quite aware that she was entirely dependent on her glass of champagne for her gaiety.

The Duchess, looking exquisite in a dress of pinky mauve, sat to the right of Jacques. She talked with nervous animation and her eyes had a strangely bright light in them. The bride seemed to exercise a sort of fascination over her, for she kept looking at her. She watched her with intense curiosity and, from time to time, an enigmatic smile played over her lips.

As to Annie, she was really very pretty, for the emotion she felt tinged her face with pink and her happiness made her look unusually gentle. She avoided meeting her husband's eyes, but she could feel them constantly fixed upon her and this embarrassed her so much that she did not understand what Guy de Nozay was saying to her.

Jacques played his part with all the ease of a *grand seigneur*. He looked frankly happy and he was inwardly enjoying the shyness and dread that he saw depicted on his wife's face.

After the breakfast, Christiane and the Marquis found themselves alone for a minute.

"Well, was the ceremony as terrible as you had imagined?" asked the Duchess.

"No, I was seized at once by a sort of religious emotion," he answered. "It seemed to take me back to the day of my first communion, I might say of *our* first communion," added Jacques with a smile. "It was most curious. I saw you again just as you were that day, very slender and very pretty, with your blue eyes and a sort of cloud of white all round you. I

saw myself, too, distinctly, a little boy with fair hair, wearing a black suit and a white armlet as the symbol of innocence. On finding myself kneeling before the same altar on my wedding-day, with the wax taper in my hand, I felt deeply moved. You see, one may no longer be a Catholic, but it is good to have been one. Catholicism leaves memories in our lives which can never be effaced."

"And you are happy?"

"More so than I can express."

"Then everything is right," said the Duchess.

She then asked, in an abrupt tone, as though to cut short any sentimentality:

"When do you intend returning to Paris?"

"In about four months, probably. The Portuguese Embassy will leave our house in December. The architect will then take possession and all will be ready for us, I hope, by the end of February. Are you not glad to have us for neighbours?"

"Oh, very glad," replied Christiane, with an ironical note in her voice that grated on Jacques' ears. "I am curious to see what marriage will do for you. It changes a man as much as it does a woman."

"There is one thing it will never change, and that is my friendship with you. Do not imagine that you are going to get rid of me. I could not do without your advice and your friendship. And first of all, you must let me write to you."

"Write to me?" exclaimed the Duchess. "You want to write to me while you are on your wedding tour?"

"Why not? I am so much in the habit of telling you everything that I am sure I shall want to tell you my impressions. Do you know what you ought

to do?" said the Marquis, as though struck with a luminous idea.

"What ought I to do?"

"You do not know Rome. Well, come and join us there."

"You are mad."

Anger and pain gave such an extraordinary expression to Christiane's words that Jacques looked at her in surprise.

"Mad—why?"

"Because——"

Jacques bowed.

"When a woman gives me that reason, I never insist," he said, smiling.

"You are wise," remarked the Duchess, drily. She then continued speaking, but in a gentler tone.

"Enough of all that," she said. "Be happy. I wish you a blissful honeymoon. Write to me, if you want to," she added, moving away in the direction of Annie's room.

The newly-married couple were to spend the month of November at the Château de St. Michel, near Cannes, and then to continue their journey. Mrs. Villars and Clara were to join them in Rome.

Annie had expressed a wish to go and see Jacques' flat, before leaving Paris, and Madame d'Anguilhon had invited them to dinner with her afterwards.

They were then to drive away from there to the station.

Towards five o'clock, the young Marchioness, after silently kissing and embracing her mother and Clara, went with her husband to the carriage, filled with flowers, which was waiting to take them to the Rue de Bellechasse.

From the balcony of the hotel, Catherine threw an old slipper and some rice, the old slipper to preserve them from all ill, according to the Irish superstition, and the rice for good luck. At the very same moment, the Duchess left the Hôtel de Castiglione. She might have been the evil fairy, whose approach renders all charms powerless.

Guy de Nozay accompanied her to her carriage.

"They are off to the seventh heaven," he said.

"Let us hope they may stay there," she answered.

"They would be the first to do so. Either people never get there, or they arrive and then fall out of it again, with their wings broken. Our friends belong to the first category."

"Did you ever have your wings broken?"

"No, for the simple reason that I have only met with one woman in my life with whom I would have risked trying the climb. She refused and so I decided to remain on earth near her."

"You acted wisely and your friendship is very precious to her," said the Duchess. "Adieu," she added, holding out her hand to the Viscount. "I shall see you next week at Blanzac."

CHAPTER XXIV

CHRISTIANE had always had a presentiment that there would be an absorbing love affair in her life some time. The affection she had had for the Duke de Blanzac could not be called love, or rather it was the love of a young girl, knowing nothing of life or of her own nature. She had said to herself that, sooner or later, it would be her turn to feel the ecstasy and rapture which most creatures experience. She was tired of being loved, worshipped, and obeyed by others. She wanted to be in love herself and to sacrifice herself to some one. Never had any woman had a more ideal dream of love, and the dream had filled her solitude. She had lived it over and over again, revelled in it and, as it had kept her in the high regions of idealism, it had prevented her from being carried away by any sensual temptations. Love had not come to her, though, like a flash of lightning, as she had expected it would. It had gradually penetrated like poison into her heart and flesh. Instead of a cry of triumph, it had wrung from her a cry of distress. In spite of the anguish she had felt when the Marquis had come to tell her of his engagement, she would not admit to herself that it was possible for her to be in love with him. She knew him too well. He had only a physical superiority, she said to herself. He was inconstant, rather frivolous, his character was weak, and he was

so different, oh, so very different from the man of her dream. She went over his faults and failings and her clear-sightedness somewhat reassured her. Alas, true love is just that which has no bandage over its eyes, which sees the faults and even the vices, and goes on loving all the same.

Christiane tried to make herself believe that she merely regretted the pleasant intimacy which existed between herself and Jacques. When she realised, though, that it was impossible to delude herself, she tried to cure herself of a love that humiliated her. She made use of the most heroic means to this end. She forced herself to see a great deal of the engaged couple. She went several times shopping with them, helped Jacques to choose his presents, gave Annie advice about her dress, handled the material for the trousseau, and told the bride-elect what she thought the Marquis would like best. She was present at the wedding and, in spite of the pain it gave her, made herself look at the bride and bridegroom kneeling side by side. She endured the torture of the wedding-breakfast and, as though she found a certain delight in her intense suffering, she followed Annie into her room and stayed with her while she changed her dress, looking at the pretty shape of her shoulders and at her beautiful skin. When Jacques came into the room, Christiane told him to kiss his wife and she never flinched as she watched him obey her. She saw the husband and wife leave, she heard their carriage door shut, and the sound seemed to go through and through her. When once Guy had left her, she lay back in her carriage, her head against the cushion and, closing her eyes, remained for some time motionless. Two great tears welled up and fell from under-

neath her closed eyelids, the first woman's tears she had ever shed. She wiped them slowly, saying to herself once more: "It will pass—it will pass—I shall soon forget——"

PART II

CHAPTER I

THE Château de St. Michel had been built by an Englishman half-way up the hill which dominates the Gulf of Juan. It was in the style of the abbeys so frequently seen in England. The Froissys had bought it, they said, so that they might take refuge there in their old age. In this little corner of Paradise, there was enough sun, blue sky, and beauty, not only for gorgeous sunsets, but also for radiant dawns.

The newly-married couple had a house with all the refinements of luxury at their disposal. Outside the house, the air was saturated with the scent of flowers. There were wonderful stretches of verdure, blue sky over their heads, blue in the horizon, the sea before them, and a landscape that was a dream.

In the Cannes harbour, they found the yacht at anchor which had taken them round the coasts of Normandy and Brittany. The crew, who had pleasant memories of the *fiancés,* hailed them with cheers and flowers, as though they had been a royal couple.

Annie and Jacques arrived at Cannes after a spell of bad weather. They had an exceptionally fine, warm November, so that they were able to take long drives in the neighbourhood and to make some short sea-trips on the *Sans-Souci.* Annie kept making one discovery after another and was in fresh raptures all the time. She was glad to see this south of France at last,

which all her friends had visited. Seeing it, as she now did, with her heart full of her own love, it looked more beautiful to her than it had to any of them.

The cope of poverty, similar to those leaden copes which Dante saw on the damned, had now completely fallen from Jacques' shoulders, and he felt as young and ardent as he had been at twenty. He had no other wish now than to own Blonay once more, and Bontemps held out this hope to him.

From the very first hour of their married life, the Marquis realised how thoroughly *foreign* Annie was. She was the simple and prosaic Eve of the New World, as absolutely different from the complex Eve of the Old World as it was possible for two creatures of the same species to be. With her, he had the sensation of biting some beautiful fruit, sound, but not yet ripe, the slight sourness of which was nevertheless agreeable. Her brief caresses, her limpid eyes, and her cool hands did not send him into any ecstasies, but she revealed to him the sweetness of love without either art or artifice.

Annie had accepted marriage with a frank, simple joy and matter-of-factness which had disconcerted Jacques. Some of her speeches were so characteristic and so extraordinary to a Frenchman's ears, that he could not help laughing to himself at them. He was only sorry that delicacy forbade his repeating them to a friend.

Jacques wanted to have his wife thoroughly in hand, so he took the trouble to study her carefully. His dressing-room was next to hers and, through the half-open door, he often heard her discussions and conversations with Catherine. He was immensely amused by them and they helped him to understand her char-

acter. He was glad to see that his wife's maid was beginning to approve of him, for it would have been disagreeable to feel that Annie had any one near her who was hostile to him. He had had no difficulty in winning over the Irishwoman. He knew how to talk to old and trusted servants and he had always had some friendly word for this one.

Marriage had changed Annie visibly. Her expression was now gentler and less childlike. She was less independent in her manner and not so stiff in her movements. She wrote one day to her cousin: "Jacques tells me that my expression has changed and I am curious to hear what you will say. If it is true," she added, "that happiness makes people more beautiful, then I certainly must be very pretty now."

Annie was very happy in her new life, not completely happy perhaps, as she found it difficult to feel quite at home with her French husband. It always seemed to her that he was a little distance away from her. His sensitiveness and nervousness disconcerted her, and when she saw him plunged in one of the reveries in which he so often indulged, she looked upon him as a phenomenon. She had never in her life seen a man dreaming before.

In America, European men are believed to be full of iniquity, and Annie often wondered whether her husband had been very wicked. She longed to question him on this subject, but she did not dare. She was very proud to be the wife of the Marquis d'Anguilhon and, in spite of her own reasoning, the title seemed to make her feel greater. She liked the coronet embroidered on her linen and on her toilet articles. She was ashamed of her vanity at first, but she came to the philosophical conclusion that it was probably

in human nature to like such things and that, after all, she was not a goddess.

The Count and Countess de Froissy returned to their home early in December, but they insisted on keeping their guests a week longer with them. The Count liked his new niece and delighted in making her talk. Her contempt for the routine of people and nations who do not go with the times, and her deliberate avowal of her intention to enjoy life as much as possible, amused him immensely.

"Annie is certainly the prettiest piece of prose that any one could ever read," he said, one day, when they had been talking about her, but he added, mentally: "It is to be hoped that that rascal, Jacques, will be satisfied with the prose."

Towards the middle of December, the Marquis and Marchioness d'Anguilhon left for Naples, on board the *Sans-Souci*, taking away with them fragrant memories enough for their whole future life.

CHAPTER II

Mrs. Villars and Clara spent the month of November with the Keradieus in Touraine, and then left for Rome, where George Ottis was to join them.

The Marquis and Marchioness d'Anguilhon, on arriving at Naples, had found Vesuvius covered with snow and a deluge of rain. They shivered with cold everywhere they went, and when they were tired of waiting for the sun to make its appearance, they decided to go to Rome in search of a little more comfort and enjoyment. Annie telegraphed to her mother to engage rooms for them at the Hôtel de l'Europe, where she was then staying.

The newly-married couple were awaited with impatience and, on their arrival, they found their drawing-room full of flowers, brilliantly lighted, and enlivened by a bright fire. Jacques was touched by the trouble that had been taken in order that they might have a pleasant impression, and he was most cordial.

Clara, who was longing to have a chat alone with her cousin, soon carried her off, under the pretext of showing her to her room. With the shyness of a young bride, Annie had kept her thick veil down, but Clara very quickly untied it for her and took it off.

"Let me see this great change you told me of," she said, looking at Annie critically. "Yes," she added, "it is true that you look different."

"Do I look better or worse?"

"I do not know. Your eyes look larger and you are older-looking——"

"Older?" exclaimed Annie, in dismay, hurrying to the glass.

"Oh, I did not mean that you have wrinkles yet," said Clara, laughing, "but now look," she added, putting her arm round her cousin and her own face quite close to Annie's.

"Do I not look younger than you?" she asked.

"Yes, I must confess you do."

"You are now a wife, and a Marchioness into the bargain. That is more than enough for making any one look older."

"How is George?" asked Annie, by way of changing the subject.

"A little overworked, the dear boy. A few months of rest will set him up again and he richly deserves the holiday. His position is made now. Not bad that, at thirty-two years of age. Do you know, he will stand comparison with your husband. He belongs to another type, but that is all. George is like a good Newfoundland and Monsieur d'Anguilhon like one of those big greyhounds that allow themselves to be petted and spoilt like so many Pashas. I hope he will not give himself airs with George."

"Give himself airs! Jacques! Oh, he is too much of a *grand seigneur* for that."

"Well, let us hope that your greyhound and my Newfoundland will get on together."

"I hope they will."

"I was surprised that Monsieur d'Anguilhon was willing to put up at this hotel."

"Why not? Oh, he has a very strong family feeling.

He always says that he cannot live long away from his mother."

"An American or an Englishman would rather be flayed alive than own such a thing."

Catherine now entered to help Annie to change her dress.

"Well," said Clara, kissing her, "and how is the new household getting on? Have the lovers quarrelled yet?"

"Quarrelled!" exclaimed Catherine. "Ah, Miss Clara, I would not wish you anything worse than as beautiful a honeymoon as your cousin has had."

George Ottis was introduced to Jacques. As they shook hands, the two men evidently made a good impression on each other, and the cousins, who were watching them anxiously, exchanged a glance of satisfaction.

Annie and her husband dined with Mrs. Villars. Clara could not help observing her cousin all the time. Marriage certainly had changed the expression of Annie's face. The tender way she looked at her husband and her deference to him caused Clara a kind of irritation.

The dinner was very gay and animated, and the conversation was carried on in French and English. America, Touraine, and Cannes furnished plenty of topics and George was full of admiration for European things.

"To think," he said, "that there are people in our country who maintain that America is superior to the Old World! It exasperates me to hear people talk like that. They are like children insulting their ancestor."

"Yes," added Mrs. Villars, "we have quite a strong

party who imagine that America ought to be self-sufficing and who would willingly set fire to the ocean steamers, in order to prevent American women from spending their money in France or elsewhere."

"Well, it is simply idiotic," said Mr. Ottis emphatically, "for the women bring back ideas and models which allow us to work without endless experiments, so that, with almost the first try, we can reach perfection. Our goldsmith work and our materials prove this. I reckon that the five hundred millions we spend in Europe every year must bring us back the double and the triple."

This way of looking at things and of utilising feminine vanity amused Jacques immensely and inspired him with a certain admiration.

After dinner, Clara was anxious to know her *fiancé's* opinion.

"What do you think of this famous Marquis?" she asked him.

"I like him very well, much better than I expected I should. What have you against him?"

"Nothing except having stolen Annie from us, for stolen her he certainly has."

"Not without her permission, I fancy, for she seems very much in love with him."

"Yes, she looks absolutely absurd."

"Absurd? I do not think so. I should be very glad to see you like that, some day."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Clara, with comical fervour. "There is no danger though, I am made of sterner stuff," she added.

In his travels, Jacques had hitherto always wandered about Rome, without ever really seeing it. He was there now in the best possible condition for

really seeing it. His mind was free from care and his soul was sufficiently full of happiness to be able to react against the melancholy which emanates from the Eternal City.

The very day after their arrival, Annie gave her husband a specimen of that "sight-seeing" which is the delight of the American woman, and which she considers one of her duties here below.

As far as the Marquis was concerned, such sight-seeing was a continual source of amusement and irritation. Every day, Annie set out with her Baedeker. On arriving at a museum, she would begin either at the right or left wall of pictures, gaze for an instant at her Guide and then look up at a painting, stand before it a more or less long time, and then pass on to the next one. This exercise she would repeat for hours together with real pleasure and absolute conscientiousness. She was not pretending to admire, as she really enjoyed the sight of the masterpieces, but they charmed her eyes without making her feel any emotion whatever. She simply *saw* all the time, but she did not *feel*. She would come back from these artistic pilgrimages half dead from fatigue, but she was glad to have employed her time so well and, more particularly, to have "done" so much. On the second day, Jacques, who did not care about "doing" the Vatican, said to his wife:

"Annie, we will each go our own way here. Two people can never see in the same way and we should only interfere with each other."

"Very well," she answered gaily, little thinking how much this meant. Several times, on turning to look at her husband, she saw him lost in contemplation before some picture or statue and she said to herself,

with a little, superior smile: "He is seeing nothing." It was true that he only saw five or six pictures and one or two statues in a whole museum, but he not only saw them, he felt them too, and carried them away graven on his mind for ever. Certain of the masterpieces brought tears to his eyes. The face of a Madonna, or the figure of a goddess would haunt him for days together and plunge him into delightful reveries.

In Rome, the hour of the Ave Maria, the Christian *Mohgreb,* has a mysterious charm which the dreamers, the poets, and all people with a little refinement, must feel. There is, at that moment, a passing of souls, as it were, through the air. Memories seem to rise from the very ground and from the churches and monuments. It seems as though the past becomes the present again, and as though, for a few moments, the dead mingle with the living. Women return home feeling a delicious thrill and with their senses stirred. They are singularly prepared, at such moments, for what Paul Bourget calls "love crimes."

Jacques was always strongly impressed by the Ave Maria hour. Whenever he happened to be outdoors at that time, he suddenly became silent, his step slackened and, for a few minutes, he fell under its strange influence.

One evening, as he was leaving St. Peter's, the great bell of the church rang out the Angelus. The sound of this bell, unique in the world, brought him to a standstill under the peristyle. He looked around; the Square was deserted, but the vibrations of the great bell filled it with prayer.

"Ah, how beautiful it is!" he murmured, deeply affected.

"Superb, immense!" said Annie. "I do not remember though," she continued, "how many feet the Square and the colonnade measure. I must look."

These words produced on Jacques the same effect as a cold shower-bath. His emotion ended in a smile. He had felt the spiritual beauty of everything and she only the material beauty. Without noticing the disastrous effect she had produced, she proceeded to open her Guide and then, by the last gleams of daylight, looked up the figures which, according to her way of thinking, gave the real value to the sight before them.

Jacques did not endeavour to bring Annie gently to share his impressions. He kept them jealously to himself. It is only in very rare cases that a man shows himself just as he really is. Whatever he may say to the contrary, he does not care to be thoroughly understood. He is delighted to think that there is some hidden place in his soul, some corner of his mind to which his wife has no access. This is, for him, so much liberty that he keeps.

Annie's nature and temperament made Jacques' thoughts turn to the woman who was her living antithesis, the Duchess de Blanzac. They had talked together so much, discussed ideas and analysed so many sentiments, that now, with his mind full of new thoughts, he felt that he needed to talk them over with her.

"How she would understand this or that!" he was constantly saying to himself, and he would have given a great deal, at such times, to have seen her feelings reflected in her eyes. Sometimes in a picture gallery, he would come across a portrait which resembled the Duchess, or a statue which had some of her lines.

Such portraits or statues attracted him irresistibly, and he would remain looking at them for a long time. The very first week of his stay in Rome, he had written her a long letter, full of his impressions and sensations. A current of warm affection ran through the whole letter. Christiane had answered it in a gay, witty, ironical way, in an intentionally commonplace style and, at the end, she added the following postscript:

"You ask me why Rome does not attract me? It does attract me very much indeed. I am always waiting to go there until I am not alone, in order to enjoy it thoroughly. There, are you satisfied with my reason?"

This postscript, so thoroughly feminine, and so unconsciously perverse, disturbed Jacques' tranquillity.

"Until she is not alone," he repeated. "Is she thinking of marrying again then, I wonder?"

"Why should she not?" he asked himself, but he felt at the same time, that, if she did, he should lose her and that it would be the end of their intimacy. This idea tormented him for several days. He then consoled himself with the thought that Christiane would not easily resign herself to giving up the wealth she had inherited from her husband.

Annie little thought that she already had a rival. She had no idea of the capacity of her husband's heart and she little knew what kisses his lips could give. She could not conceive of more complete happiness, and she kept repeating to herself all the time that he was simply perfect.

The Marquis got on very well with his American relatives. He thoroughly appreciated the discretion and the excellent character of Mrs. Villars. He had

taken to call her "Aunt Mary," as Clara did, and this had put their intercourse on a very friendly footing. He could not help admiring the conscientiousness with which she accomplished this third pilgrimage to Rome, and he owned to himself that he did not know many Frenchwomen of her age capable of being so sincerely interested in the masterpieces of art and in historical associations.

Jacques found a way, too, of getting on with Clara. In reality, she was still hostile, but she was rather awed by him, and did not dare indulge in her impertinences with him. He delighted in teasing, and even exasperating her, and then he would calm her by some charming little speech, calling her his "beautiful cousin," or he would hold her in check by a certain expression that he would put on which always took effect, the expression on the face of the Van Dyck picture at Versailles.

Jacques liked George Ottis and even rather admired him. It made him indignant to see the poor fellow subjected to Clara's petty, feminine tyranny, and he said to himself that he hoped Annie would never take it into her head to try treating him as an American.

One evening, on returning home from her mother's, his wife said to him, in a very natural way:

"Jacques, we are going to Frascati to-morrow."

This way of arranging for him gave the Marquis rather a shock.

"Who are *we?*" he asked, raising his eyebrows.

"The Walters, Mother, Clara, George, and you and I."

"Before arranging for me, my dear girl, you should have asked me whether I had any other plan. It happens that I had decided to go to the Villa Madame.

It appears that when the atmosphere is clear, the sea is visible from there, and as we are having very fine weather, I want to go there. You are quite free to go to Frascati, though, if that amuses you."

For the first time, Annie felt the bit, and it made her rear.

"Right," she answered, in her most independent tone, "I shall go."

As she was determined to give her husband a lesson, she sat down deliberately at her writing-table and opened her Baedeker to read all she could about Frascati. She was so disturbed in her mind, though, that she could not fix her attention on what she was reading. She did not understand a word and, when she attempted to write, her hand, usually so steady, trembled horribly. She was furiously angry, but her strong will came to her aid and she only raged silently for a few minutes. Her compressed lips then relaxed and trembled slightly, as though the tears were not far away, and a sad look came over her pretty face. Jacques, under the cover of reading the *Figaro,* was observing her and he now felt very much tempted to say a tender word to her, but he resisted. It was his theory that a man should not spoil his wife during the honeymoon and that, from the very first days of their married life, he should accustom her to respect his authority. He felt that it was all the more necessary to act thus since Annie was American.

In a very nervous state of mind, she finally got up, moved about the room, changed the place of a chair and of several knick-knacks, and arranged the cushions differently on the sofa. Whilst doing this, she glanced several times at her husband, whose proud-looking,

clearly-cut profile was distinctly outlined against the light.

"He really is like one of those greyhounds," said Annie to herself and, strangely enough, the curious comparison made her see her mistake. She realised that this man was neither a Frank Barnett nor a George Ottis and she said to herself that she ought to have remembered this. She wanted to obtain forgiveness and, gradually approaching his chair, she went to the back of it and put her arm gently round his neck.

Jacques immediately threw his head back and Annie stooped and kissed him.

"I would rather go with you to the Villa Madame," she said quietly.

"I shall be delighted, Annie," he answered, and then, putting his arm round her, he drew her down on to his knee.

"Jacques—" she said, "were you angry that I had not asked you whether you wanted to go to Frascati?"

"Angry? No. Just at first, I must own that I thought the proceeding a trifle calm, but I ought to have understood that you had merely forgotten to ask me."

"Well, not exactly forgotten. I did not think I had to ask your consent for anything of such little importance," said Annie, with her admirable candour. "In America, women constantly accept social engagements for their husbands, without consulting them."

"They make a great mistake, and all the more so as the men work hard in your country. They are certainly entitled to reserve a few hours for rest, or at any rate to choose their amusements."

"Well, they put their dress-suits on without any complaint and they never refuse to accompany their wives."

"I do not fancy you will bring me to that degree of perfection," said Jacques, smiling. "You can be quite easy in your mind, though, for I am not a tyrant. You will always be perfectly free to come and go at your own pleasure and to do just as you like. I have absolute confidence in you. You have too much good sense not to conform to our habits and customs and even to our etiquette of married life. I am quite sure that, before very long, you will be quite a Frenchwoman."

Annie shook her head.

"Oh, as to that, you must not expect it. I am, and I always shall be, American," she added, with a firmness to which the Marquis did not object. "I will remember, though, that I have a French husband."

"That is all that is necessary, my darling. I only hope you may never regret it."

"Oh, you would have to be very bad for me to regret it and even then— Well, I should always have the memory of these few perfect weeks, at any rate."

Ashamed of having said as much as that, Annie disengaged herself from her husband's arm and sprang to her feet.

The following day, after luncheon, Jacques and Annie started for the Villa Madame. The atmosphere was wonderfully clear. At the extreme limit of the vast horizon, they could distinguish, not the sea itself, but the reflection of the sea on the sky, a band of silvery, moving light which showed them where Ostia lay. It was very curious and very beautiful. Never, perhaps, had the Marquis been as gay and as delightful as he

was that afternoon. Annie's heart was so full of happiness and contentment that, on the way back to their carriage, she exclaimed:

"Oh, Jacques, I am so happy!"

CHAPTER III

On visiting the various churches, it often happened that Jacques would exclaim: "Oh, if my mother could only see that!"

It occurred to Annie, one day, that it would be a good idea to invite her mother-in-law. Madame d'Anguilhon refused at first, but Annie insisted so cordially that, in the end, she accepted. The temptation to see Rome with her son was not to be resisted. Annie's inspiration was a good one for, with his mother there, Jacques thought less about Christiane.

He was no longer a believer, but his soul had received the impress of Catholicism, an impress which can never be obliterated. Catholicism is a ladder which enables man to soar towards the ideal. Many of those who push away the ladder, after using it, would never have reached the heights on which they stand without its aid. The Gothic arches of an old cathedral, the sight of the altar, and the sound of the bells appealed to the Marquis in a way which his wife could not have understood, for she knew as little about Catholicism as she did about Buddhism. The Marchioness saw, with some alarm, the moral gulf which existed between the husband and wife. She had no idea of trying to convert her daughter-in-law, but, hoping to bring her a little nearer to her husband, she endeavoured to lead her into the regions of idealism.

When visiting the churches with her, she explained the meaning of the Catholic service and symbols, told her the story of the chief saints and of the miracles which were the subject of the pictures and frescoes.

Annie listened with keen interest, but remained cold to it all.

"All these supernatural things give a sort of fabulousness to Catholicism," she said, one day. "It seems to me like a sort of Christian mythology."

Jacques could not help smiling. He glanced at his mother with a mischievous expression in his eyes. The poor Marchioness was horrified.

"Do you really believe in these miracles, these legends?" asked Annie, turning to her, unconscious of the enormity of the question she was asking.

"My dear child, I believe Catholicism to be divine, consequently nothing in it seems to me impossible."

"And then, too, you have been used to it all from your childhood," continued Annie. "When one hears all this, for the first time, at my age, it all seems childish and, forgive me for being so frank, it seems so useless."

"Useless!" exclaimed the Marchioness. "But it has inspired the masterpieces that you admire. Thanks to it there has been the most sublime self-sacrifice. Think of the Sisters of Charity, for instance. It doubles the force of mankind, and if it only served to make us forget this sad world for a time, it would not be useless."

"To make us forget this world? But why should we? It is not at all a bad sort of place. I am quite contented with it. I assure you it is quite good enough for me."

The Marchioness could not help laughing.

"My dear child, you are satisfied with it, because you are happy," she said. "Think of the multitudes of wretchedly unhappy people in it, though. Such people need to look heavenwards, and all that is supernatural helps them. The women who burn candles for the sake of obtaining some favour, those who fetch oil from the Madonna's lamp with which to anoint the sick person they are tending, take back hope with them. Do you not think that hope is a great comfort?"

"Yes, but I think it would be better to cultivate moral strength and to teach the poor creatures to bear their misery bravely."

"And how would you lessen the hatred that the poor have for the great of this world?"

"By obliging the great of this world to work for the happiness of the poor and for easing their life. And then, too, by showing the poor that the rich have sorrows as great as theirs and diseases that are sometimes much worse. All that is quite true."

"Bravo, my little simplist!" put in the Marquis.

"I believe that the burdens are adapted to the shoulders that are to bear them, and that the good and evil are better meted out than people generally imagine. Hundred of times I have pitied people who were quite content with their lot. So far, I have been very happy, but I shall have my share of sorrow. I quite expect that."

"What do you think of the evolution of woman after that, Mother?" asked Jacques.

"I am very pleased to have a proof of it," answered Madame d'Anguilhon, smiling affectionately at her daughter-in-law.

The Marchioness was always somewhat disconcerted by the directness of Annie's reasoning. When she

talked religion or sentiment with her, after a few minutes she usually felt as though she had suddenly come upon a smooth, impenetrable wall, and it generally ended in her changing the subject of the conversation.

One day, Annie saw her mother-in-law's prayer-book on the table and asked permission to look at the numerous illustrations. Madame d'Anguilhon could not very well refuse, but it was with great reluctance that she saw a heretic's fingers irreverently turning the pages of a book which contained the secrets of her very soul.

"How funny!" exclaimed Annie, every now and then, on seeing the pictures of various saints in ecstatic attitudes.

The Marchioness understood the meaning of the word "funny" and was horrified. St. Francis of Assisi, with his poor hands pierced, was considered funny, and St. Theresa, with her face lighted up by divine love. St. Monica, too, holding her son's hand and looking up to heaven.

Presently, Annie came to a beautifully-painted little picture of Jesus in excruciating pain, with his breast torn open, showing his bleeding heart.

"Oh, but it is awful to look at!" she exclaimed.

"It is a symbol, my child," replied the Marchioness, evidently embarrassed.

"It is rather coarse, though, I think. I would rather not know that Jesus had a heart just like ours."

Coarse, the Sacred Heart! Marie Alacoque's vision coarse!

Jacques was immensely amused and would not have missed this little scene upon any account.

To the great annoyance of Madame d'Anguilhon, Annie then began to read the prayer-book.

"How curious!" she said soon, "I thought I knew French fairly well, but I do not understand half of what I am reading here. I am surprised that Antoinette de Keradieu should have had the courage to adopt a religion that is so complex."

"But Catholicism is making great progress in your country, is it not?"

"Oh, we like to try everything. There are even people who are freaks enough to go in for Buddhism. And then, you may be very sure, that Americans will take and leave what they want of Catholicism."

Annie continued turning over the pages of the prayer-book.

"All these things would spoil this world for me —and the next," she remarked.

Presently she began to read a few lines aloud:

"I have, at last, the joy of possessing Thee, oh, God of love. Why am I not all heart. Embrace me, oh, God, burn and consume my heart with Thy love——"

Annie stopped short.

"It has no sense!" she said. "How dare any one speak of God like that! Such words could not be sincere. Who wants to have one's heart burnt and consumed with love!"

The word Confession excited her curiosity and she began to read the examination of the conscience.

"Have you had any evil thoughts?"

"Were they voluntary ones?"

"What do you mean by evil thoughts?" she asked, looking up at her mother-in-law, with her limpid eyes.

Jacques coughed and the Marchioness flushed

slightly. Just as she was about to reply, the carriage was announced. Without thinking any more of the question she had just asked, Annie closed the book and went quickly away to put on her hat.

When once the mother and son were alone, they looked at each other and smiled.

"I would not change my little heretic for a pupil from the Sacred Heart Convent," said Jacques.

"No," replied his mother, slowly. "If Annie is not capable of imagining to what heights mankind can mount, she does not, at least, know to what depths it is possible to descend."

While they were still in Rome, Jacques received some news which put the finishing touch to his happiness. The Château of Blonay had been sold by his father, twelve years previously. It was as though Providence did not wish the old nest of the Anguilhon family to be profaned, for the manufacturer who had bought it had died without having inhabited it. He left no children and his widow rented the land, but kept the château for one of her nephews. When she stayed at Blonay, she took up her abode in one of the hunting-boxes in the grounds. As soon as the Marquis was married, Bontemps made inquiries about Madame Mottet's business affairs and was informed that she had lost a great deal of money. With this knowledge, Bontemps went to work, and he had now succeeded beyond his hopes. In spite of the increased value of the land, thanks to the money that had been spent on it, the present owner was willing to sell it again for the price her husband had given for it, four millions, provided the money were paid down at once. Bontemps telegraphed to the Marquis for permission to proceed with the purchase. On reading the telegram,

Jacques turned pale with emotion and, unable to utter a word, he handed it to Annie.

"What good luck!" she exclaimed. "Answer your lawyer at once and I will cable to New York for the money immediately."

Jacques seized Annie in his arms and kissed her in a transport of joy and gratitude.

"How happy we shall be at our beautiful Blonay!" he said, his eyes misty with his emotion. "You will love it, I am sure."

After a three weeks' pilgrimage through the churches of the Eternal City, Madame d'Anguilhon decided to return to Paris and get the house ready for the young couple.

Jacques and Annie accompanied her as far as Florence and, on the way, they took her to Perugia and Assisi. For years she had longed to see the places where the various episodes of the life of St. Francis had been enacted.

The little town, full of shadow and silence, impressed Annie more than the splendours of Rome.

The narrow streets, some of them with steps, the low-roofed old houses, and the curious little shops amused her immensely. The stationary look of people and things struck her all the more forcibly from the fact that her brain was full of pictures in which life was at its utmost degree of intensity. She felt as though she had been transported to another age.

"How interesting it all is!" she kept saying.

The Marchioness told her the story of the lives of St. Francis and of St. Claire.

"What a pity they could not marry, as they were so fond of each other!" said Annie.

"St. Francis and St. Claire marry!" exclaimed Jacques. "Oh, horror!"

"They were destined for a higher state," said the Marchioness. "Our little love affairs are very petty and trivial compared with the almost divine affection which united them. You may be sure that the joy they experienced was very much deeper than ours."

"Do you think so?" asked Annie, with an expression of doubt in her tone.

"Well, my dear child, you have an instance here of that force of soul which produces the marvellous, and which is only to be met with in Catholicism. Thanks to that alone, St. Francis and St. Claire have influenced the whole world, built thousands of monasteries, and wafted a breath of charity and poetry through the Middle Ages. That force has preserved Assisi from oblivion and destruction far more effectually than either glory or money could have done. You see that, after five centuries, it still has power to attract and touch the hearts of thousands of pilgrims."

"It really is very curious," owned Annie. "Ah, there will never be any saints in America," she added, in a droll way.

"Who knows?"

"Oh, no, I cannot imagine an American sacrificing his wealth, preaching poverty, and talking to birds. Instead of St. Francis, we may, perhaps, have men who will find a way of lessening misery and of making the world more comfortable."

"Well, I doubt whether they will ever do as much for humanity as these two humble ones of Assisi. I am sure they will never inspire anything as beautiful as those two churches, one above the other, and Giotto's mystic frescoes."

Just as the Marchioness had said these words, her son uttered a cry of admiration. They had been introduced into the cloister of the convent, and this cloister, with its Gothic arches and its marvellous perspective, overlooking the entire Umbrian Valley, is one of the beautiful things of this world.

"Ah, the monks were great artists," said Jacques. "How well they understood choosing their places of retreat! What meditations they must have had here, in the silence of night under a starry heaven!"

"Look what a pretty picture!" exclaimed Annie, standing still in admiration.

In the background of the deserted cloister, an old monk, in his brown robe and with his hood thrown back, was walking up and down, with a tired step, reading his prayers. In a cage, fastened on to one of the columns, a bird was singing at the top of its voice and on the wall, underneath, two beautiful gillyflower plants were blossoming in chipped vases. Jacques caught Annie's arm and they both stood still for a moment.

"Do you know," he said, "that this little picture represents more human effort than your Brooklyn Bridge? It required a St. Francis for creating that monk, an evolution and a revolution for emptying this cloister and for bringing a bird and flowers here. It has required centuries, too, for giving the right tone to these stones."

Annie looked at her husband in admiration.

"That is quite true," she said, "I should never have thought of all that. I must really begin to reflect," she added, in a serious tone that was very droll.

Towards the end of their stay in Rome, Jacques noticed a change in his wife. She seemed less gay

and less ready for everything. She often had fits of bad temper. Catherine was the only victim, but still all this indicated some moral disturbance and Jacques began to wonder anxiously whether her real character were now beginning to manifest itself.

At Florence, the evening before the departure of the Marchioness for Paris, the young couple were alone after dinner. Annie was seated near the fireplace. She looked anxious about something and was moving her foot about in a rather irritable way. Jacques was strolling up and down the immense drawing-room of the Florentine hotel. He was struck by the troubled look on Annie's face and, sitting down beside her, he laid his hand on the arm of her chair and said, in an affectionate, but somewhat authoritative tone:

"What is the matter, my darling?"

"The matter," said Annie, "why we cannot go to America and I shall not be at Clara's wedding. I shall have to give up all sorts of beautiful plans. That is what is the matter," she added, with quivering lips and wet eyes.

"But why?"

"Why? Oh, Jacques, I believe—I believe I am going to have a baby," she said with a pitiful accent.

"Really!" exclaimed the Marquis, springing to his feet. "Is it really true?" he asked, pale and excited, his whole face lighting up with joy and triumph.

"It is only too true."

"Too true? Do you mean to say that you are not delighted?"

"Frankly, no, I am not."

The expression of Jacques' face became suddenly so cold that Annie hastened to add:

"I should like to have children, but in two or three years' time, not now."

"Nature would have to allow for all *your* little arrangements and that is rather a great deal to ask," said Jacques, with a shade of severity in his voice.

"I hope though," he continued more gently, "that you love me enough not to regret an event, the very idea of which fills me with joy."

"Oh, Jacques, that is the only thing that can make up to me for all my disappointment."

The Marquis knelt down in front of his wife and took her two hands in his.

"How ever could you keep this secret so long to yourself?" he asked, reproachfully.

This was the first time Annie had ever seen her husband on his knees before her.

"I did not want to spoil the rest of your time here," she answered, in a tremulous voice, "and so had decided not to tell you till we were back in Paris."

"Not to spoil my time here, but how could it?"

"Because it is so horrible."

"So horrible?"

Jacques could not help repeating the words, which amazed him so much.

"Yes, in America we do not think women in this condition at all interesting. We are rather ashamed of them, and many men do not care about seeing friends of the family at their house when they are in this state."

"Well, thank Heaven that we, of Latin race, have enough imagination to be able to see the poetical side of certain realities. We think a woman in this stage of maternity infinitely touching. We like the dreami-

ness of her expression, the slowness of her movements, and the change in her figure."

"You really think me interesting like this?"

"Interesting and adorable."

Annie gave a little nervous laugh.

"This reminds me of an engraving I once saw in a shop window in the Rue de Rivoli. A young woman was seated with some of the little garments of the layette on her lap. Standing up in front of her was an officer, with a moustache rather like yours, and he was holding a tiny baby's hood on his fist. I was horrified to see a little scene like that reproduced for the public. Clara made fun of it, and just said that an American would never make himself so ridiculous."

"Well, there you have just the difference of the Latin character. I know that picture and I have never looked at it without feeling a certain emotion. And I shall do like the officer. I shall put them on my fist, these little hoods and I shall kiss them, even when Clara is there."

"Oh, no, you must never do that," exclaimed Annie.

"I certainly shall, and how I shall dream about this son of ours—for it will be a son——"

Annie, blushing, annoyed, and deeply moved at the same time, put her hand on her husband's mouth.

"Oh, do please be quiet," she said.

The Marquis rose and, sitting down beside Annie, put his arm round her shoulder.

"Does your mother know?" he asked.

"Before you? Oh, no, I have not said a word to any one. Catherine has guessed and she is wild with joy. She prays for me night and morning. She has candles burnt and she laughs and cries by turns. It is a regular comedy. She beseeched me not to let you

see how vexed I am, for she assures me that you would think badly of me, but I cannot act and then, too, it is a great disappointment not to go to Clara's wedding."

"I will do my utmost to make it up to you in some way," said Jacques. "Now," he continued, "let us go and announce the good news to my mother."

He held both his hands out to his young wife and when she was standing up before him, he kept her there for a few seconds, gazing at her with such a tender, eloquent expression in his eyes, that Annie, blushing and confused, tried to release herself.

"Let us go and find your mother," she said.

The Marchioness was busy, putting the various objects she needed in her travelling case.

"Here I am, my dear children," she said, gaily. "How queer you both look, though," she added. "Have you been having a lovers' quarrel?"

"No, we are not lovers who quarrel," answered Jacques. "We have a surprise for you, though, so prepare for a great joy."

"I have had so many lately, that I am beginning to get used to them."

"Well, then, listen. I will whisper it to you, as they would in America, for it is horribly shocking, is it not, Annie?"

"Yes, certainly," she replied.

The Marquis put his arm round his mother's neck, his lips to her ear and whispered a few words to her. The book Madame d'Anguilhon was holding fell to the ground, and her face showed the emotion she felt. She pushed her son aside and, going with outstretched hands to Annie, kissed her without uttering a word.

"Oh, my child, what happiness!" she managed to say at last. "It is really true then? I guessed as much, on seeing you again, but, as I heard nothing, I concluded that I was mistaken."

"You guessed?" exclaimed Annie, extremely surprised. "How?"

"By a certain expression that gave you an interesting look."

"There, what did I tell you just now?" exclaimed Jacques, triumphantly.

"I really must know what you call an interesting look," said Annie, going to the glass and examining herself very carefully.

"I cannot see anything extraordinary," she continued. "My face looks drawn, and my eyes have dark rings round them. It is not beautifying, by any means," she added, with a shade of vexation in her tone.

"Would you believe, mother, that your daughter-in-law is sorry to think she is going to have a baby, as she would have preferred going to America," said Jacques, in a half-vexed, half-joking manner.

"I think that it is very natural," replied the Marchioness. "It is rather hard for a young wife to have all the cares of maternity thrust upon her all at once."

"Ah, I am glad to hear you say that," cried Annie, gratefully.

"Yes, I can understand that you must have some difficulty in resigning yourself to all the sacrifices that your state demands. In a few weeks' time, though, a feeling so strong and so sweet will come into your heart that you will not regret anything more. I ought to know," added the Marchioness, with a tremulous

smile, looking at her son with an expression of infinite tenderness in her eyes. "You did well to tell me the good news at once," she continued, "I shall hurry up the workmen, so that your house will be ready as soon as possible."

"If Annie feels tired, we can go back to Paris at once, and stay at the Hôtel Castiglione."

"Tired!" exclaimed his wife. "I never felt better in my life. I want to do everything we had planned to do and I must see Venice, Milan, and Turin."

"Quite right, my child. Do everything your health allows you, but be prudent and do not overtire yourself. Your mother will be with you and she will look after you. I am very glad she is coming."

When once they were back in their own rooms, Annie said to her husband, in a convinced tone:

"Jacques, your mother is much better, much more indulgent than you are."

"I am quite of your opinion, darling," replied the Marquis.

Mrs. Villars, Clara, and George Ottis, who had gone to Naples, joined Annie and Jacques at Venice. Mrs. Villars was by no means delighted at the news her daughter had for her. She had been counting on Jacques' visit to America for allaying the distrust of her sisters-in-law and of other members of their family. His visit was now, of course, indefinitely postponed and this was vexing. As to Clara, she did not spare her cousin.

"I said it would be like this," she kept repeating and she did not try at all to make Annie feel her disappointment less keenly.

CHAPTER IV

Ever since her return from Italy, Madame d'Anguilhon had been busy getting her children's home ready for them. Whilst the repairs were being done to the house itself, she had organised the household. The servants she engaged were from Blonay. They were sons and daughters of old servants of the family, and everything was now in excellent working order.

On arriving, Jacques and Annie found the house warm and comfortable. There were flowers and plants everywhere, the servants at their respective posts, and all traces of the long absence of the Anguilhon family had disappeared. In spite of the early hour, the Marchioness was there to receive and welcome them.

Directly after breakfast, Annie wanted to see her new abode.

"It is so amusing," she said, "to come into a home like this without ever having seen it."

The house dated from the end of the seventeenth century. It was built between a large courtyard and a garden that extended to the Rue de Babylone. Its cold, gloomy look struck one more than the beauty of its architecture and its proportions. On the ground-floor, it had a beautiful suite of drawing-rooms, with dining-rooms, a billiard-room, and a

library. On the first floor, which reached by a fine staircase, were the ball-room and the private dwelling-rooms.

The interior of the old house seemed terribly severe in style to Annie's American eyes. The drawing-rooms had very high ceilings, the walls were hung with old brocade, and the furniture was very sober-looking. There was not a single knick-knack or gewgaw to spoil the royal simplicity of everything, and the absence of such things seemed to freeze Annie. She felt that this setting was too heavy and too big for her. She kept repeating:

"It is very beautiful, it is all very beautiful!" but there was no enthusiasm in her voice, and her face grew longer and longer. The last drawing-room, however, led into a conservatory, and the large windows opened on to one of the prettiest corners of the garden. Annie was delighted with this room. It was light and cheerful-looking, with panels hung with embroidered silk. There was a more homelike feeling about it and it seemed as though she could breathe more freely here. There were roses, too, in this room from the Duchess de Blanzac and flowers from the Keradieus, the Prince de Nolles, the Viscount de Nozay, and the Count de Challans. These proofs of friendship served to efface her first impressions. Her husband's rooms, which she visited next, seemed magnificent, but too severe. When she came to her own suite of rooms, though, she forgot all the rest of the house. It was all arranged in the purest Louis XV. style. The brocaded silk hangings, the bedstead painted white and decorated with Cupids and tufts of feathers, the furniture with curved outlines, the duchess arm-chairs, and little sofas and the screens, all constituted an *ensemble*

of the most perfect good taste, which simply charmed Annie.

Suddenly she coloured and looked at her mother-in-law in an embarrassed way.

"These were your rooms, though," she said, "you ought to stay here."

"My dear child," said the Marchioness, smiling, "when I was obliged to leave this house, six years ago, it was a great grief to me. It seemed as though I could never breathe freely or even live in my flat in the Rue de Bellechasse. In a very short time, though, I had grown accustomed to it and I now understand the words of Horace: 'The smaller the house, the greater the peace.' This peace has now become precious to me. It leaves me time for charitable work and for reading and thought. If I were rich again, I should not change my way of living. I must confess that I should not like a daughter-in-law whom I could not have loved to have these rooms, but it is a real pleasure to me to see you in them."

"Oh, how good you are," exclaimed Annie, deeply touched. "I want to ask you something," she added, after a slight hesitation.

"What is it?"

"I know nothing of your ways and customs here, and absolutely nothing about French housekeeping. I am afraid of making blunders and I do not want Jacques to think me more stupid than I am. Would you help me a little and show me how to go about it all?"

"Very willingly."

Annie's face brightened at once.

"Well, then, I shall consult you whenever I am in a fix. Are you quite sure it will not bore you?"

"Quite sure. Make use of me as you would of an old friend. And now, my child, I will leave you to dress. I am going back home, but I will come to luncheon and introduce your servants to you. I have chosen them very carefully and they know their work, so that everything will go along like clockwork."

Annie kissed her mother-in-law without waiting to be kissed by her. It was the first time she had done this.

"I am so glad to have you," she said, prettily.

When Jacques was alone in his father's rooms, which from henceforth were to be his, the emotion he felt made him realise keenly the deep meaning of life. He sank down on an arm-chair and, for some time, simply looked around. He then rose and went and handled the tapestry, the bronze ornaments, the weapons, and all the other objects which he had so nearly lost for ever.

Presently, his mother appeared in the doorway. He went towards her and, taking her hands in his, kissed them.

"How you must have suffered in reviving old memories like this," he said. "I ought not to have allowed you to get things ready for us."

"You would have deprived me of a great joy. At present, I am above and beyond certain regrets."

"What a strange thing life is," said Jacques. "We were obliged to leave this house and now we are brought back again to it. What is the use of all these vicissitudes?"

"They are, perhaps, for helping us in our evolution, as Annie would say. The six years which have just gone by have not been lost on you. You have gained experience, and I hope you have acquired wisdom, too."

"Yes, I have."

"Well, then, do not seek other reasons. May God guide you now and preserve you from yourself."

"Oh, I am so happy that I should be capable of promising you to sin no more."

"I do not ask as much as that," said the Marchioness, smiling. "Remember, though, that happiness lays as many obligations on us as *noblesse* does."

"I will remember," answered Jacques, gravely.

CHAPTER V

"I SHALL forget," Christiane had said, but—she could not forget. When once she was back at Blanzac, she used all the means which her large fortune put at her disposal for diverting her mind. She managed to appear gay and careless all day long, but when she was alone again Jacques took possession of her once more, body and soul. Their conversations came back to her mind with extraordinary vividness. She recalled certain intonations of his voice and the silences that had often fallen between them. She could feel again, in the most curious way, the impression of his kisses on her hands. She felt the soft, full lips, the silky moustache, and a thrill passed through her. . . . He had been so very nearly in love with her. She wondered whether he would have given up the idea of Annie's wealth for her sake, and whether she would have given up her husband's wealth for him. Yes, both of them would have been capable of such folly and both of them would probably have regretted it afterwards. This conviction consoled her more than anything else. The Duchess's vivid imagination became an instrument of torture to her. She saw, only too distinctly, the newly-married couple together, she saw them caressing each other, confiding in each other. She saw them walking slowly, arm-in-arm, in the beautiful park of the Château de St. Michel, which

she knew so well. Maddened by these visions, she felt tempted, at times, to rush away to Cannes and, from some hiding-place, have a glimpse of the husband and wife, in order to learn what was their state of mind.

Christiane returned to Paris earlier than usual. She wanted to be near Dr. Moreau, as it seemed to her that he alone might be able to help her to chase from her heart this ridiculous and painful love.

During his stay at Petit-Port, the doctor had witnessed the Duchess's intimacy with Jacques d'Anguilhon. He had guessed that she was in great danger and would have been glad to convey her away to the other end of the world. When he saw her now, he knew that his fears had been realised.

"She is lost," he said to himself. "Love at thirty is incurable."

Like all fresh remedies, the change of scene did Christiane good at first. But when the time drew near for Jacques' return, she became more and more agitated. The Anguilhons' house was next hers and for years she had passed it like any other house, but, at present, the gateway, the courtyard, planted with trees, the lions on the stone steps, all these things of stone and wood affected her strangely. Several times she went in, to see how the repairs were getting on. One day, she even went up to the first floor and, urged on by a sentiment that rendered her will powerless, she stole into Jacques' rooms and examined them with an emotion that was both painful and delicious. On seeing that they were separated by a corridor from Annie's rooms, she experienced a joy that made her blush for herself.

The day when the Marquis and Marchioness d'Anguilhon were expected back, Christiane, who had been

awake a long time before daylight, found herself listening intently for the slightest noise that should announce their arrival. As soon as she knew they were there, only a few steps away from her, she longed to see the young wife, to question her, to find out—what? She did not know herself what she wanted to find out, but it seemed to her that she should feel tranquil after seeing Annie. She went out shopping to the Bon Marché, but she was only there a few minutes. She then set off walking at random and, after going a very long way round, she arrived at the door of the Anguilhons' house, just as the clock was striking eleven. She stopped, under the pretext of asking after them, and, on hearing that the Marquis had just gone out, she went in to see his wife. She had hoped that Jacques would not be at home.

Annie was delighted at the idea of seeing the Duchess again and came downstairs at once. On seeing her advance, through the long suite of reception-rooms, the Duchess guessed that she was in an interesting condition. It gave her a violent shock and it was with quivering lips that she kissed her.

"I was passing," she said, "and could not resist the temptation of coming in to welcome you home."

"I am so glad to see you again," said Annie, in a sincere tone of voice. "Your beautiful roses gave me the greatest pleasure and I always fancy that flowers bring good luck."

"I think you are looking still prettier," said Madame de Blanzac after scanning Annie's face eagerly.

"Do you really think so? Oh, so much the better."

"Well, did I praise French husbands too much?"

asked the Duchess, with a smile that ill concealed her emotion.

"No, Jacques is perfect, but I expect there are not many men like him."

"Oh, yes, there are," answered Christiane, and then, urged on by a strange curiosity, she began to ply Annie with questions, trying to lead up to certain confidences. Annie did not understand and she simply told about their travels without the slightest embarrassment, and without any emotion at all. Her husband's name was constantly on her lips and it was easy to see that he was the axis round which her own life turned. By means of all she told, and without having any idea of it herself, Annie opened the sanctuary door of her married life wide enough for her visitor to see all at a glance. Christiane understood that Jacques was a tender husband, but he was not a lover. She had come in search of this conviction and it made her so happy that she felt strangely grateful to Annie and, on leaving her, she kissed her with an outburst of sincere friendship.

"I am delighted to have you for a neighbour," she said, on going away. "You will be welcome at any time. If you need any advice on any matter, put on your hat and come to me at once. That is a bargain, is it not?"

Christiane knew that Jacques would not fail to call on her that day. Towards two o'clock, when she heard his footsteps, she felt weak with emotion. When he entered the room, his joyful, triumphant air contrasted so thoroughly with her own feelings, that she at once regained her composure. She held out her hand to him, as she would have done to an ordinary visitor.

"And so you are back from the perilous journey?" she said gaily.

"Perilous journey!" repeated Jacques, laughing. "Is that what you call the wedding-trip?"

"Is it not a good name for it? People often come back from it minus their illusions. Sometimes they come back with a broken heart. That is not your case certainly, for you look like a happy man."

"And I am a happy man," answered Jacques.

As he uttered these words, he bent his knee before the Duchess.

"What are you doing?" she asked, frowning.

"Returning thanks," he answered, half seriously and half in a joke. "This time last year I was desperate. I had run out of my money and had nothing left but to go and end my life decently in Africa. At present, everything is open to me. I have the best things this world has to give and I owe everything to you."

A spasm of pain contracted the Duchess's face.

"You owe everything to me! You are much too modest. You won your wife's heart by your good looks. And then, do you not think that your marriage was foreordained? Even if I did help, I was obliged to do so. Yes, I had no choice," she added, with a sort of anger.

"Whether you were obliged or not, it is very sweet to me to think that I owe my happiness to you."

"But I do not care to have you give me credit for what is not due to me."

These words were uttered in so haughty a tone that Jacques immediately rose and looked at the Duchess with a questioning expression, as though asking her her meaning. He had never allowed any woman to

treat him disdainfully, or to make him the plaything of her caprices.

Christiane pacified him with a smile.

"Sit down," she said gently, "and do not look like an offended god. You must have a hundred interesting things to tell me. First of all, what do you think of marriage?"

"Everything has been very pleasant," he answered, but from the tone of his voice it was evident that he had not quite recovered from his annoyance. "Annie is simply a treasure. She is always gay, even-tempered, and very good-hearted. I do not imagine that there are many women who would have invited their mother-in-law to join them on their wedding-trip."

"No, indeed!"

"And this visit was a very happy idea, for my mother and Annie now know each other well and are the best of friends. I was very much afraid that the difference of nationality might prove an obstacle to this, but I was mistaken. How do you think Annie looks?"

"She looks charming. She has very much improved," said the Duchess, with praiseworthy honesty.

"Yes, has she not? And—did you notice——?"

Christiane's eyelids quivered.

"Yes—I congratulate you."

"When I think that, in a few months' time, I shall have a son——"

"Or a daughter——"

"No, no, a son," repeated Jacques. "Oh, I expect everything I want now. You cannot imagine how happy the thought of this makes me. I should have been in despair if my family had died out absolutely."

These words harrowed Christiane's very soul.

"And what are your plans now?" she asked, by way of changing the subject.

"As we cannot go to America, I shall begin by organising things for our house."

With all a young man's ardour, Jacques began to explain his plans, but, either warned by Madame de Blanzac's expression, or instinctively feeling that it was not exactly good taste to appear so thoroughly master of his wife's money, he suddenly stopped short.

"There is really so much to be done," he said, "that I do not know where to begin. Blonay has not been inhabited for twelve years. It will have to be put in a habitable state, for I want it to be my son's birthplace, as it was mine. The very thought that I shall see it again makes my heart beat. I shall be so glad if you will come and stay with us there in October. I will show you all the nooks and corners of the old home. It is full of memories of my childhood and youth. You have come so thoroughly into my life, that I shall want you at Blonay, just as I wanted you at Rome."

"At Rome, during your honeymoon?" exclaimed the Duchess, appearing to doubt his words, simply for the pleasure of hearing him repeat what she knew to be true.

"Yes, Annie is a foreigner and a Protestant. There are crowds of things that she could never understand. My thoughts often went out to you at Blanzac. If telepathy really existed, you would have known of it. You cannot imagine how delighted I am to have you here, close to me. You cannot escape from me," added Jacques, laughing.

Christiane's face darkened over.

"No," she said, as though talking to herself, "I cannot."

"I owe you a big debt," continued Jacques, gravely, "although you will not hear of it. I hope it will be possible for me, even if I cannot pay it back, to do something for your happiness. In the meantime, I want you to promise to consider me your best friend. Will you?"

Christiane nodded, without uttering a word, and Jacques' eyes glistened.

"Thank you," he said, quietly, "I am very glad you consent."

He then rose and took leave of her. The Duchess watched him go away with a sad look in her eyes. She had thought so much about him and she had hoped— She asked herself what she had hoped. She could not answer this question, nor did she wish to answer it. She only knew that she was horribly disappointed. He had come and talked of his happiness, of his wife, of his child, and of his future plans. He had expressed his gratitude to her and that was all.

"Ah, he is very much married," she said to herself. "A few more visits like this one and I shall be quite cured."

CHAPTER VI

When a tree is transplanted into new soil, its life undergoes a sort of sudden stop and then its roots begin to seek for the juices necessary to them. They absorb one substance, reject another and recoil, like sensitive plants, from contact with harmful elements. For some time the functions are irregular, the sap mounts, stops, and then begins to mount again. The tree languishes and then revives, recovers definitely, or dies. The identical thing takes place in a human being who is uprooted and transplanted. Annie went through all these phases and suffered all the more on account of her strong individuality. During her wedding-trip, she had not felt that she was irrevocably separated from her own people. When she was in the old family home of the Anguilhons, where she could not even hear the noises of Paris, where she was surrounded by new faces and heard no more English, she felt very, very far away from America, and this made her heart rather heavy. As soon as she could escape from what Clara called her "fortress," she hastened to the Hôtel Castiglione. She went with her mother to the dressmakers and all about Paris. She took pleasure in chaperoning her cousin here and there, chattering all the time, as though she had been deprived of speech for days and days.

Mrs. Villars and Clara stayed in Paris only three

weeks. Their departure was a great trouble to Annie. When they were actually getting into the train, it was all she could do to keep from sobbing. When once the train moved off, she seized her husband's arm instinctively, and clung to him.

On their way home again, Jacques talked to her of their journey to America in a year's time. The year would go so quickly, he assured her. He went through all the pleasant things they intended doing and, with a few of the tender words which he knew so well how to say, he managed to restore her good spirits.

With the common-sense that characterised her, Annie tried to initiate herself into the ways and customs of the people among whom she was to live. Madame d'Anguilhon helped her in the most intelligent and kindly way. She drew up her visiting-list for her, told her the histories of the persons with whom she would have intercourse, and did her best to give her all the necessary information about everything.

Every day, Annie took her Paris correspondence to her mother-in-law, who told her the terms to be employed in her various letters and gave her details about the charitable institutions of which people wrote to her. She also taught her how to keep house. Annie was soon able to put dollars into francs, to examine the bills presented by the *chef* and the butler, to choose the *menus,* and to give all the necessary orders. She was soon able to grasp the material side of French life, but the mental and moral side remained an enigma to her.

Her reception by the Faubourg St.-Germain society somewhat disconcerted her. As the rich Miss Villars, she had been made much of, but as the Marchioness d'Anguilhon, she was received coldly. She was treated

as a little American who had married a title, and she noticed that people took a condescending or patronising air when they talked to her. In spite of her name and rank, she was less at home in French society than she had been the year before. At dinners, receptions, and when paying calls, people talked of persons and families she did not know and stories were told which she was at a loss to comprehend. She was not well up in the intrigues, gossip, politics, or literature of the day and could not, therefore, take part in the discussions. People who were introduced to her, or to whom she was introduced, soon saw that she was not *au courant* and just exchanged a few commonplace remarks with her. She came away from all these receptions bewildered and disconcerted. In this foreign atmosphere, she was, of course, struck by the defects which were the most objectionable to her, such as sentimentality, exaggeration, and everything artificial. Some of the people seemed to her to be too prudish and others too free. The latter both amused and shocked her. When she saw certain smiles on the lips of women and certain expressions in men's eyes, she felt uncomfortable and was glad to go and take refuge among the dowagers. This was considered to be rather clever scheming on her part. She was disgusted to hear the conversation turn constantly on the subject of love and on the conjugal troubles of this husband or that wife. French flirtation was a revelation to her, and a revelation that was neither pleasant nor reassuring. She was horrified to hear men and women of the highest rank freely discussing certain subjects, and she could not help expressing her indignation to Madame de Keradieu.

"My dear child," answered the Baroness, "you must

take into account the fact that English is a language without delicate shades. It is a very strong language and it makes vulgar things sound absolutely ignoble, whilst the French language renders them irresistibly droll. You have been struck by the two extremes, but you need not be alarmed. In the Faubourg society, you will find a good average of virtuous people, quite enough to satisfy you."

"How I pity American women who have married over here just to get a title!"

"I know a few who seem very happy."

"Oh, that is surely impossible," exclaimed Annie, impetuously. "If I did not care for Jacques as much as I do, I should take the first boat back to America."

"And before the end of a year, my dear girl," said Madame de Keradieu, "you would have returned to Paris."

During the first few months, Annie's life would not have been enviable, if she had not had the friendship of the Keradieus, of the Duchess de Blanzac and the Viscount de Nozay.

The Duchess was not jealous of Annie, as she felt that she and her husband were so far apart. She felt a curious desire to be kind to her. In society, she took pains to show her up to the best advantage and came to her rescue constantly, in a hundred different ways. When Annie met her glance or her smile, she always felt as though some one had taken her by the hand. She often went to the Duchess for advice, and there was great intimacy between the two households.

The Viscount de Nozay liked Annie's society. With her moral and physical healthiness, she had a restful effect on him, after so many nervous women and so

many, too, with nervous disorders. Her simple-mindedness amazed him. It was the first time he had ever been able to read a feminine soul without the least difficulty.

One day, on seeing her fresh, young face among a group of women, whose eyes and lips had been cleverly touched up and whose hair had been dyed golden or red, he said to himself in astonishment: "But she does not even put any powder on her face!" This fact seemed to mean to him that she was absolutely without a woman's weapons, and he took her, in a way, under his protection. She always found him near her when she needed him. Guy now had a rocking-chair at his disposal at the Marchioness d'Anguilhon's, as well as at the Keradieus, and he declared that he had sufficient consolation for the rest of his life.

It was not only in society that Annie felt strange, but in her own house, too. She could not get used to the ways of the servants. The importance that the Faubourg domestics put on, irritated, and almost intimidated her. She had none of those words at her command which make the intercourse between servants and their employers go smoothly. Words were just what she lacked. She only appreciated deeds. She was one of those rich people who never have anything but gold coins with them, who never carry small change.

Annie felt nothing yet of that sentiment, so strong and sweet, of which her mother-in-law had told her. When she had taken the first little garments of the layette to show to Madame d'Anguilhon, and had seen the tears come to her eyes and her fingers tremble as she handled them, and then had heard her murmur: "I never imagined it would be so sweet to feel one's

self a grandmother," she had felt ashamed of her own indifference. She could not help it, though, and then, too, she had not recovered from her disappointment at not being able to go to Clara's wedding. When she had read the description of the ceremony in the newspapers, she had had a fit of anger and grief. She thought of the effect Jacques would have produced, as they walked up the church aisle. All eyes would have been fixed on him, and every one would have envied her! "It really is too annoying," she had kept saying to herself and she wished, at the bottom of her heart, that this precious baby had stayed a little longer among the angels. The presence of Jacques was always enough, though, to chase away her home-sickness and all her regrets. When he was with her, she was perfectly happy. But, unfortunately, he was not often with her now. From morning to night, he was occupied with the arrangements for their house. He had to see lawyers, tradespeople, and workmen of all kinds. He went to Blonay every week, to hurry on the repairs and alterations, for he wanted to have everything ready for June. He very rarely had time, even, to go with Annie to the Bois, in the mornings.

She had felt a little pang when she had seen that her husband was to have a suite of rooms to himself. This French arrangement, which leaves a husband and wife a certain freedom, seemed absurd to Annie. It was all very well, as she said to herself, if they wanted to play *The Ironmaster*. She realised that the intimacy of Cannes and Rome was all over and she felt almost like a widow. In Paris, Jacques seemed to her like another man. He was less boyish and more important as it were. She did not care to go to his rooms without some pretext, but she always

found one easily enough. She liked paying these little visits. The Marquis, with his exquisite courtesy, always rose to receive her and welcomed her with some pretty little speech. She would sit down on the arm of his chair, as that was always her favourite place and, perched up there, with his arm round her, she chattered to her heart's content and found it very amusing.

It seemed to Annie, though, that in Paris, there were too many people and too many things between herself and her husband. Sometimes she regretted that he was not a simple American. They would have been more free and more happy, as they could have shut up their house and started off to Egypt, India, or China so easily. She liked his name and title, but they certainly did bring, in their train, a whole crowd of obligations. She felt as though she had been caught in a network, the meshes of which were being drawn up around her. She wondered in alarm, whether, like most of the women of the aristocracy, she should be always obliged to turn round in the same circle. For the sake of reassuring herself on this score, she was always finding a different way of making Jacques repeat that he was modern, extremely modern, that he liked travelling, and that he was longing to see America.

CHAPTER VII

When a soul is destined to experience passionate love, that love will develop in its own good time, and neither will-power nor any efforts will prevent it from following its course and accomplishing its work of elevation or degradation, of life or death. It was thus with Christiane's love for the Marquis d'Anguilhon.

To all appearance, Jacques was just the same as ever with the Duchess. He went to see her nearly every day, he consulted her about everything, and had the warmest friendship for her. She felt, though, that he had, in a way, escaped from her power. He looked at her and did not see her. There was nothing now in his kiss on her hand and their conversations were absolutely commonplace. He appeared to avoid touching on all dangerous subjects. It was all in vain that Christiane tried to console herself by saying that he was "very much married." That did not cure her at all. When he came near her, her whole being thrilled, she was filled with divine joy, and the very sun seemed to be brighter. When he went away, she felt an inward wrench and a horrible sensation of cold. It was no good reasoning with herself, as this phenomenon took place in spite of all her reasoning. Pride, rather than virtue, prevented the Duchess from attempting to win Jacques back. The idea of sharing his love with another woman was revolting. She had always con-

sidered that, in such cases, the lover was more ridiculous than the husband, the mistress more to be pitied than the legitimate wife. She had often argued in this way and it was her conviction. The love she felt for the Marquis humiliated her. It was an affront to her character and to her past life. She would have denied it in the very face of death, and she was only tranquil because she thought that she was capable of hiding it from everyone.

Christiane belonged to the same feminine type as St. Theresa. She had the capacity of feeling every kind of voluptuousness, even that of grief. In the end, she found a certain enjoyment in suffering. Her love became all the dearer to her, because she was crucifying it. It was as though she bore within her something that was living. She would exclaim sometimes in a sort of ecstasy: "I am in love, I am in love!" and this state seemed preferable to her to the *néant* in which she had hitherto been living.

Dr. Moreau knew that she was no longer struggling and so he struggled for her. He endeavoured to interest her in charitable work as before. She would listen to him for a few minutes and then become absent-minded. She would answer in monosyllables and simply offer money for the charity in question. The year before, she had been like a beneficent goddess in her bountiful, genial charity, but now she was only a poor woman in love, a woman whose thoughts were all centred in one being.

Dr. Moreau felt the deepest pity for her. He said to himself that the physical affinities which existed between her and Jacques would, in the end, bring them together. He knew too much of life not to be aware that adventures of this kind invariably terminate in a

catastrophe, and he vowed to himself that he would watch over the Duchess and save her, if possible. He would save her and give her to the unfortunates of the world.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Marquis d'Anguilhon had no intention of using their money in trying to outdo, in luxury, all the financiers, rich manufacturers, and foreign *parvenus*. Like most of the men of the French aristocracy, he felt that he owed Paris a sort of grudge. He argued that the nobility, ruined in the name of humanitarian ideas, might very well, now, turn this weapon against its enemies. It might live as much as possible in its châteaux, remake its estates, encourage agriculture, and help the peasants. In a word, it might put into practice the famous principles which the middle class, occupied in getting rich itself, had merely proclaimed. Jacques was quite prepared to set the example. With his wife's approval, he had decided that the appointments of their town house, in Paris, should be on quite a simple scale and that they would give to Blonay its original splendour.

At the very commencement of feudal times, the Anguilhons had built their family nest on a hill in the province of Bourbonnais, about an hour's journey from Moulins, and the château was considered one of the finest in France. The news of the return of the owners caused great excitement in the neighbourhood. The name of the Anguilhons was in all the legends and in all the stories that people told in the long winter evenings. In 1789, the tenants had defended

the château against the revolutionary bands. Jacques' grandfather had rescued two children from fire in a burning farm-house. In all the epidemics, the château people had never been afraid to risk their lives, and had braved contagion at the bedside of their tenants. Every winter, the Marchioness had always sent warm garments and all the money she could spare for the Blonay poor. When any of the people had business in Paris, they never failed to go and pay their respects to " their lady." They were always sure of a welcome and they had always found a good meal in the modest kitchen of the Rue de Bellechasse. All these things had given the Anguilhons a popularity which neither politics nor bribery could diminish. In many of the little homes, the Anguilhons were still prayed for and when the parish priest announced the anniversary of the death of a member of the family, these poor people considered it their duty to be present at the Mass. The peasant is instinctively conservative, and he does not care for middle-class people who are either too familiar or too proud. Putting money by slowly himself, the peasant has not much faith in the honesty of rapidly-made fortunes. Then, too, now that he no longer fears the taxes which he had been led to believe he would have to pay, he prefers the château being inhabited by an old aristocratic family rather than by *parvenus* who, according to him are " nobodies."

On his return to Paris, Jacques had put Blonay into the hands of a clever architect. He had employed workmen day and night, so that the house was quite ready for the early part of June. The priest had begged Jacques to come back on the day of the village fête, so that he could be welcomed without giving any offence to the Mayor.

On the sixteenth of June, Jacques, with his wife and mother, arrived at Moulins. They stopped at the hotel to have luncheon and then got into a landau drawn by two superb horses.

It was beautiful weather and, from Moulins to Blonay, the road lies half-way up some green slopes and gradually mounts until it overlooks the valley. Annie could not stop to admire the fine panorama which stretched before her to the right, as she was looking for the château.

"Where is it?" she asked, with childish impatience.

"There," exclaimed Jacques suddenly.

It was as though his word had been magic, for the imposing building loomed out before them in the distance, the stately outlines of a fifteenth-century château, with its pepper-box towers.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Annie.

"Yes, is it not?" said the Marquis, gazing proudly at the old family home.

As soon as the carriage was seen, the flag with the arms of the Anguilhons was hoisted on the château and then the flag of the United States.

At the sight of this, Annie uttered a cry of joy.

"Oh, Jacques, thank you!" she said, flushing with pleasure.

"I wanted you to feel quite at home, my little Yankee," answered the Marquis, smiling.

As the carriage passed under the triumphal arch, which had been put up at the entrance of the village, the bells pealed out joyfully, caps were waved, and enthusiastic "Hurrahs" were to be heard from all sides. Jacques bowed in return with a truly royal graciousness and with that kindly, and at the same time dignified, manner, that made him so fascinating.

Both he and his mother were deeply affected. Annie was simply delighted. It was the first time in her life that she had experienced the pleasure of an ovation and she thought it perfectly delightful. There was only one thing she regretted and that was that her mother, her aunts, Clara, and all New York were not there to witness this triumphal entry. The carriage drew up at the church. It had been decided that they should get there in time for Mass. The priest came to the door to receive them and conducted them to their pew, the pew which had been empty for twelve years. At the risk of being sent away, Monsieur Nambride sang a *Te Deum* and addressed a few words of welcome from the pulpit to the returned exiles. Madame d'Anguilhon had asked to be allowed to offer the consecrated bread, which was given not only to those who entered the church, but also to the crowd gathered in the Square. On leaving the church, two pupils of the "Sisters of the Presentation" stepped forward and handed magnificent bouquets of a rose peculiar to that district to the Marchioness and her daughter-in-law. Hundreds of voices then cried: "Long live the Marquis! Long live the Marchioness," and then: "Hurrah for America!" Well-meaning as this last cry was, Annie did not like it. It gave her the impression that she was not looked upon as one of the family.

The carriage now went on its way. It passed slowly along between two lines of people, curious to see the new arrivals. A second triumphal arch had been put up at the other end of the village and, after passing under this, they turned to the right, continued another five minutes, and then came to the boundaries of the estate. They drove on up-hill, crossed the drawbridge,

now always lowered, entered the court of honour, and, after describing a magnificent curve, drew up at the stone steps of the house.

Jacques was too deeply affected to trust himself to speak. He only clasped the hand which his wife put into his, as she stepped down from the carriage.

Blonay was built on the heights. From the wide terrace, above which the imposing and massive château rose, the whole valley could be seen, and grassy slopes led down to a beautiful park. In spite of the severity of its style and of its interior decoration, it was neither hard-looking nor cold. The two principal façades had an east and west aspect. There was so much sun and light in the vast rooms that the personages on the tapestried walls appeared to be smiling, and the old oak woodwork shone. Among Jacques' ancestors, there had been scientific men, chroniclers, and poets, as well as warriors. The latter had bequeathed their weapons and trophies of victory to their descendants and the former had enriched the library and had bought works of art. The brilliant wit and intelligence and the generous soul of the Anguilhons had put something warm and congenial into the family abode which made a very agreeable impression on Annie.

From the very first minute, she felt more at home here than she had ever felt in the Rue de Varenne house, where she had been living for three months. If Jacques had allowed her, she would have begun at once to inspect the château, but he insisted on her resting until luncheon. He and his mother took her to her rooms, passing through the picture-gallery with its portraits of the Anguilhons. The American girl felt almost shy as she glanced at these grand ladies, all so stiff and so imposing, at the knights

in their armour and the nobles with their frills and doublets.

"I shall have to make their acquaintance," she said.

"That will be very easy," answered the Marquis. "You will find their history written in our archives. We will look them up together."

They passed through a suite of admirably-furnished reception rooms, crossed a landing, and Annie was then shown into her rooms. She was capable of appreciating what was really beautiful and rather liked the simplicity of her drawing-room, but she was simply delighted when Jacques showed her the boudoir that he had arranged for her in the tower, which formed one of the corners of the château. This room was hung with Persian draperies, the furniture was very beautiful, and there were books and flowers and everything necessary for rest and work.

"And to think that all my life I have wanted a room in a tower," she exclaimed, "and in a tower like this," she continued, "old and grey with a cone-shaped roof."

"I am very glad to be able to satisfy your fancy," answered Jacques.

"I had never dreamed of so beautiful a view, though," added Annie, looking at the lovely valley, crossed by the Allier and at the blue chain of the Puy-de-Dôme mountains.

Madame d'Anguilhon laid her hand gently on her daughter-in-law's shoulder.

"Now, my dear child, enough admiration for the present. You must rest a little."

"Well, I will go and rest, just to please you."

"That is right."

"I hope you will be happy here," she said, kissing Annie, and mentally she added, "happier than I was."

"Oh, I am sure I shall be," answered the young wife, with her fine confidence.

After luncheon, Annie wanted to have an idea of her home. She had never seen a real château, except in pictures, so that she was greatly impressed by Blonay as a whole. The thickness of the walls, the monumental fire-places, and all that reminded her of far-back times of which she knew so little, caused her astonishment mingled with respect. When she compared this old dwelling with the most beautiful houses she knew in New York, she realised better than she had ever done the difference which exists between aristocracy and plutocracy.

With the approval of her daughter-in-law, Madame d'Anguilhon had invited the priest to dinner. Monsieur Nambride was a man of superior intelligence, very sincere and a gentleman. For the last twenty-five years, he had been a friend of the Anguilhons and a devoted and faithful friend too. He had been at the death-bed of the Marquis, and Madame d'Anguilhon had always been able to count on his good advice and his moral help. On hearing of Jacques' engagement to a foreigner and a Protestant, he had had grave fears. He considered a mixed marriage of this kind as an imperfect union, and he had had dreadful visions of the Anglican Church, of deaconesses, and of attempts at religious conversion. As soon as he had seen Annie, though, he had felt reassured. Her respectful behaviour during Mass gave him a very good opinion as regarded her tact and her character.

Annie, on her side, who had heard so much about the influence of the Catholic priest in the families of the

aristocracy, had very much dreaded the Blonay one. She was too thoroughly American to be able to endure the intervention of any one in her household and she intended to be on her guard. She was very favourably impressed by the distinction and refinement of Monsieur Nambride and she was fascinated by his face, with its regular features, from which shone forth a good and loyal soul. She said to herself that he was a gentleman and that one fact set her mind at rest, as far as he was concerned.

The thought of the first dinner made Annie feel very nervous. Her rôle as lady of the manor rather alarmed her and she had never realised that she was a marchioness so much before. In the superb oak dining-room, with its armorial bearings, its high-backed chairs, the footmen in full livery, and the butler as imposing as some high functionary, she even felt herself that she was quite an important person. On looking around her, Annie remembered the words of her husband at Assisi, and she felt that it had taken several centuries to bring this home to the state of perfection which so charmed her. She herself looked like a modern portrait in an antique frame, and the contrast was so pretty that it brought a smile of satisfaction, several times, to the lips of the Marquis.

The dinner went off very pleasantly and they finished the evening on the terrace. Monsieur Nambride talked well and Annie liked his Touraine French. He quite won her heart, though, by the interest he took in American things. On going away, he thanked her for the money she had given for distribution among the poor.

"I shall give you an account of everything that is

done with it, Madame," he said. "I should like you to know all the happiness and relief the sum you have placed at my disposal means. I thank God for sending you to us. Now that we are four," he added, looking at Jacques and his mother, "we shall be able to do great things." With these words, the priest took leave of his hosts.

Catherine had spent the whole afternoon visiting the house. It all seemed to her very romantic and it had impressed her very much more than the house in the Rue de Varenne. At night, when she came to wait on her young mistress, she looked radiant.

"Oh, my darling, what a beautiful home you will have!" she said.

"Very beautiful, indeed," answered Annie, "and I feel that I shall be happy here."

Catherine began to talk enthusiastically about the chapel, the underground passages, the enormous kitchens, the conservatories, and the park.

"If only your aunts and your cousins could see it all!" she added.

"I will send them photographs," said Annie, "and I am going to write to mother, at once."

"Oh, not to-night, my darling!" protested Makay.

"Yes, I must, or I should not be able to sleep."

In spite of Catherine's entreaties, Annie insisted on putting on her dressing-gown and settling herself in an armchair, with her writing-pad on her knees. She at once began her letter, and wrote off half a dozen pages without stopping. She described her triumphal entry into Blonay and added:

"I felt like the Queen of Italy passing along the Corso and I discovered that it is not as easy as people think to play the part of an important person." At

the close of her letter she said: "You ought, all of you, to be very proud and very pleased to hear that the American flag is floating over one of the oldest castles in France."

CHAPTER IX

ANNIE expected the birth of her child at the beginning of August and she kept saying that she had never felt better in her life. Madame d'Anguilhon was both amazed and alarmed at her activity. The very day after her arrival, she had insisted on visiting Moulins and she went for an excursion in the neighbourhood every day. She enjoyed nothing as much as going to Vichy, where the season was at its height. She would lunch at the restaurant of the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs, listen to the music for a short time and return home, delighted to have seen a little life and not in the least tired. The provincial towns, with the grass growing in the streets, caused her the greatest astonishment. She watched the people and was surprised that the French could be so solemn-looking. One day, on going to pay a call at a very old house in Moulins, she said to her husband quite seriously:

"Are you sure that the people are alive inside?"

"Alive?" exclaimed Jacques. "They are very much alive and very much there, too."

She was not long in discovering for herself that these provincial people, whom she had scarcely thought alive, have to be taken into account in France.

Annie had imagined that her name and her great wealth would suffice for winning a certain popularity in the neighbourhood. She was somewhat astonished

to find that she was treated by the Blonay people, and even by the peasants, with reserve and even with distrust. When she went through the village, people greeted her respectfully, they even came out to their doorsteps to see her, but they looked at her with more curiosity than real liking. The children would stop playing as she approached, nudge each other, and whisper: "Here's the American lady," very much as they might have said: "Here's the Bogey!"

She felt rather humiliated by all this, all the more as she had the best intentions and was quite prepared to act as a Frenchwoman would have done. Ever since she had been at Blonay, she had realised that she had responsibilities, and she was anxious to do her duty as lady of the mannor in a creditable way. If it had not been for the help and guidance of her mother-in-law and the priest, she would have been greatly at a loss to know how to do any good in these fresh surroundings. The dirtiness of the peasants' houses horrified her so much that she spoke to the priest about it.

"Do not imagine," he said, "that it is like this everywhere in France. Our country might be divided into clean provinces and dirty provinces. Normandy, Anjou, and Touraine are clean; Brittany, Auvergne, and Bourbonnais are, unfortunately, dirty. Why is this so? We shall have to look for the cause of this vice in the temperament of the people. I have been in despair about it for twenty-five years."

Thereupon Annie's brain began to work. They would build a sort of club-house, such as they have in America, where peasants might meet together and find books and all sorts of more wholesome amusements than the public-house. Lecturers might come

and teach them the laws of health and keep them informed about the various discoveries concerning agriculture. Then sanitary arrangements might be better organised for facilitating cleanliness, and shrubs and flowers might be planted round the cottages. Prizes could be given to the women who kept their houses in the best order.

The priest approved all these ideas enthusiastically. Annie's energy and her forward movement delighted him and he would rub his hands and say: "Hurrah for America!"

On the second of August, there was great silence throughout the house. The servants were all going about on tiptoes, closing the doors after them quietly and speaking in hushed voices. The birth of the child was expected from minute to minute.

Jacques had taken refuge in the library. His face was drawn with anxiety and he was pacing up and down the room trying to master his emotion. After an hour of anguish, the door suddenly opened and the doctor appeared.

"A boy," he announced, triumphantly, "and a very fine specimen too. Allow me to congratulate you. Everything is satisfactory."

Jacques wiped the cold perspiration from his face.

"Ah, I knew it would be a boy," he stammered out, beaming with joy, "I felt sure of it. It had to be a boy."

As soon as he was allowed, he went to his wife's room. His heart was beating quickly as he approached the bed. He stooped and kissed Annie so tenderly that, in spite of her languor, she felt the unusual fervour of his caress.

"Oh, what a nice kiss!" she murmured and then,

with a smile, she added: "I am so glad it is a boy."

Madame d'Anguilhon now appeared, carrying the little one. She presented it to the parents without uttering a word, but her eyes were wet and her lips were quivering.

Annie kissed her child and then examined him seriously. "Heaven be thanked, he is not ugly," she said, "and he has some hair."

In his dreams, Jacques had always thought of his son with wide-open eyes, walking and talking. He was a little taken aback at this little red face with its closed eyelids. He pressed his lips to the little forehead almost timidly, but the touch of this warm, velvety flesh, thrilled his whole being and paternal love awoke within him in all its sweetness and in all its strength. He kissed the tiny hands over and over again, stirred to the very depth of his being by this new caress.

"The doctor tells me he is a very fine specimen. What do you think, Mother?" he asked, with a shade of anxiety in his tone.

"He is admirably well formed and will be a beautiful boy," answered the Marchioness. "You were neither as strong nor as pretty."

"Really? Oh, then I feel quite easy in my mind."

"Jacques," said Annie, "you must send a cable to my mother, to Clara and——"

"To the two aunts, I suppose."

"Yes, and if you will send the news yourself, I should like it——"

The Marquis raised his wife's white hand to his lips.

"I cannot refuse anything, to-day. I will go myself

to Moulins and I will call at Monsieur Nambride's on the way," he added, kissing his mother.

While his horse was being saddled, Jacques wrote out the messages to Annie's family, to his own, and to the Duchess de Blanzac and Guy de Nozay. He smiled on thinking what a sorry figure he would have cut if he had had to announce the birth of a daughter.

The first experience of paternity, like first love, arouses feelings that never come a second time. At the thought that the sap was mounting once more in the old family tree and that a male offshoot would now perhaps give it a few more centuries of existence, Jacques felt as though he himself had suddenly grown greater and stronger. His son! During the whole of his ride this sweet name was on his lips and in his heart. On his way back to Blonay, he looked at the old château and could not help smiling as he thought of the contrast between this huge nest of granite and the tiny child that had just been born in it. As he passed through the village, he guessed that the happy event was known there. The people came out to their doors to salute him. The women smiled with a knowing air, and these mute congratulations touched him deeply.

In order to lessen her own responsibility and also thinking that Annie would be glad to have a relative and countrywoman of her own with her, Madame d'Anguilhon had asked Madame de Keradieu to come to Blonay during her daughter-in-law's confinement, and very grateful Annie was to her for this idea.

The young mother wished to nurse her baby herself, and when she told her husband this he was very agreeably surprised. He would never have dared to suggest

it to her and he even felt it his duty to point out to her all the sacrifices it would entail.

"I know," she replied, "but the doctor says that I am exceptionally healthy, and it seems to me that I ought to do my utmost to transmit this healthiness to our famous young offspring. Then, too, Mother nursed me, so that I feel in a way obliged to do for my child what she did for me. You see," she added, smiling, "we Americans do not go about trying to create duties for ourselves, but we do perform those that are put upon us."

As a result of this decision, instead of the regular be-ribboned wet-nurse, the child had an English nurse. Catherine regretted, in the most comic and touching way, that she could not be in two places at one time, as she would so much like to have brought up "Miss Annie's" baby herself. In the faithful old servant's heart, and indeed frequently to the young Marchioness' face, Annie was still "Miss Annie."

The convalescence was always a delightful memory to the young mother, for Jacques was most charmingly thoughtful and attentive. As she lay on her sofa, they all came and talked to her. Subjects of all kinds were freely discussed, religion, politics, and social questions, so that she learned more about France and French things than during her two seasons in society. With her modern and independent spirit, the opinions she expressed sometimes had the effect of bombs on her audience. Madame d'Anguilhon would throw her head back with the haughty gesture peculiar to her, Madame de Keradieu would look down, and the poor priest was all at sea, whilst Jacques and Henri de Keradieu smiled under their moustaches. One day, the conversation had turned on the intolerance of the Government and

Monsieur Nambride told of the brutal way in which a certain priest and a functionary had been dismissed from office, because they were accused of reactionary principles.

"Such things would not happen in America, I feel sure," said Madame de Keradieu.

"No," answered Annie; "in the first place, because no one would think of trying to go against the Republic, and secondly, because the churches are absolutely independent of the State. With us, those who want a church pay the expenses of it. Candidly, though, when a priest or a functionary is in the pay of a republican government, he cannot speak against it and he cannot work for the Royalists then. It is simply dishonest."

"You know," said Jacques to Monsieur Nambride, "my wife is republican at heart."

"It certainly seems to me more natural that the sovereignty should be in the hands of the mass than in the hands of one family," said Annie, boldly. "A nation that respects itself could only have one representative. I should like that representative chosen among a hundred thousand, to be perfect, physically and morally——"

"And good-looking," put in Monsieur de Keradieu, slily.

"And good-looking," repeated Annie, "and that he should have all the prestige possible. For us, a nation of workers, the representation of the White House is, perhaps, sufficient; but, really, that of the Champs Elysées seems inadequate. In France, the nobles ought to have rallied. Under their influence, the Republic would have been most elegant and refined and more powerful than any monarchy."

"But, my dear child," observed the Marchioness,

" the nobility has its traditions. It could not desert the family to which its ancestors had sworn allegiance. That would be treason."

" No, for the country must be considered first. Then, too, that family ought to have given an example of evolution and been ready to sacrifice private ambition to the welfare of France."

" You ask too much, my dear girl," said the Marquis. " If only there were a little tolerance, though, on both sides."

" Well, then," said Annie, slily, " I would advise you to make a beginning. As far as I am concerned, I intend sending a superb box of sweetmeats, when Baby is christened, to the Mayor's wife. You ought to hand over to the Mayor a sum of money for the poor, or for some scheme for the public good."

" That certainly is an idea. What do you think of it? " asked Jacques, turning to the priest.

" A very good idea, I fancy. It would make Monsieur Finet have some consideration for you, and for me, too, into the bargain. By the way, he has just bought a house looking on the Square and he would very much like to have a new fountain there. Suppose you gave him the money for building one."

" Good, he shall have the fountain."

Then, laying his hand on his wife's shoulder, Jacques added:

" Do not make us evolve too quickly, though."

Madame d'Anguilhon had asked Monsieur and Madame de Keradieu to act as sponsors for her little grandson. She wanted him to have a young godmother, so that she might act as his friend and adviser later on.

On the fifteenth of September, Philippe-Henri-Anne

d'Anguilhon was baptised in the chapel of the château. After the ceremony, Annie handed to Monsieur Nambride an envelope "from Baby." It contained a deed of gift of a piece of land, and the receipt of money deposited at the bank, for building an agricultural orphanage.

"My dream, why, it is my dream," faltered the priest, moved to tears. "It is as though God had sent a little child here purposely to give me the means of realising it. It is absolutely miraculous."

When the young Marchioness passed through the little town with her son, the people gave her almost an ovation. As the carriage approached, they came out of their houses to salute her. The boxes of sweetmeats distributed to the children had won all hearts even more than her generous gift. She knew that the ice was now broken between the Blonay people and herself and she was quite touched by their cordiality. Ashamed of the tears in her eyes, she said to her husband, almost with a touch of vexation:

"Jacques, I believe that the French climate acts on my nerves horribly. I shall end by getting sentimental."

"Oh, that would be a great pity!" answered the Marquis, in a jesting tone. "Do not be afraid, though. We will go to America now and then, so that you may pick up again."

CHAPTER X

THE Duchess de Blanzac had accepted the Anguilhons' invitation for the first of October. She said to herself, though, that she would not go to Blonay, but would find some pretext for drawing out of the engagement. She had said this to herself, by way of easing her conscience, but she knew very well that she would do nothing of the kind.

On the day fixed, therefore, she arrived at Moulins station. The Marquis was there to meet her, as a matter of course. They clasped hands warmly, and, with voices full of feeling, exchanged the usual commonplace greetings. Jacques had come in a phaeton, as it was a beautiful, warm morning.

As soon as the Duchess was installed at his side and the horses had started in the direction of Blonay, he turned toward her.

"You are here, at last!" he said, his whole face radiant with joy. "Up to yesterday evening I was dreading a telegram announcing that you were obliged to postpone your visit."

"Why were you expecting that?"

"I have no idea. But now just own that you were tempted to disappoint us."

"Tempted, no— It is true, though, that I thought several times, of going back to Blanzac to superintend the restoration of the old chapel."

"There, I was sure of it! I felt it."

"How odd!" exclaimed Christiane, amazed and rather disturbed in her mind at this intuition.

"You know I always have presentiments. I was so tormented by the idea that you would not come, and that you did not want to come, that I was half-inclined to go to Petit-Port to fetch you. As you are really here, I will forgive you the bad moment I have had on your account. Really, we should have been horribly disappointed if you had not come."

"I should have to be much wiser than I am to refuse myself the pleasure of coming to Blonay," said Christiane, in a tone of mingled sadness and bitterness.

Then, as if she wanted to escape from Jacques, she began to talk of current topics, of the Deauville races, and she also gave him some scraps of gossip. The conversation was in such direct contrast to their state of mind that they could not keep it up very long, and there was soon silence between them.

Christiane had thrown back her veil. She was looking straight before her, but she felt that Jacques was admiring her, and the pleasure of this brought the colour into her cheeks and made her nostrils dilate with pride. The purity of the atmosphere, the beauty of the sky and valley, the speed at which they were driving, accompanied by the rhythmic sound of the thoroughbreds' tread, all this, together with the presence of the man she loved, gave the Duchess a delicious sense of well-being, a kind of intoxication. She would have liked to go on thus to the end of the world —to death even.

"Here we are at Blonay!" exclaimed the Marquis, suddenly.

These words made Christiane start, and the sight of the American flag gave her a pang at her heart.

"Superb!" she said, gazing with admiration at the château, the massive structure and beautiful outlines of which stood out clearly against the horizon.

"And do you mean to say that a *bourgeois* had dared to buy that?"

"Alas, yes."

"Ah, I can understand now the grief you must have felt when such a home was sold."

"Grief!" repeated Jacques. "It was simply heart-rending, and the agony of it has left a sort of scar within me. When I saw Blonay once more, I opened my arms to it, like a child, and I kissed its old stones."

"I understand perfectly," murmured the Duchess. "All is well, though, that ends well," she added. "It seems that novelists have a special liking for some of their characters and they let them suffer as little as possible and do not kill them if they can help it. Providence seems to have a special tenderness for you, in the same way. Not only you were not allowed to go and die in Africa, but more has been given back to you than was taken away."

"Yes, that is true, and I am deeply grateful to Providence. Look, I cannot imagine anything more striking than the sight of the American flag on this castle, the foundations of which date back to feudal times. It surprises me to see it there every time I look at it. Just think what a wonderful chain of circumstances it needed, in order to bring it there. We do not study the history of things enough; it is quite as curious as the history of people. That flag marks, perhaps, the beginning of an evolution. I had it placed beside ours for the sake of pleasing Annie.

Then, too, I certainly owed it to America," added the Marquis, with the little ironical smile he always had when he made any allusion to his marriage.

Christiane did not make any reply. A few minutes later, the phaeton drove through the courtyard and round the drive to the stone steps of the house. The dowager Marchioness, Annie, Count and Countess de Froissy and several other persons were there awaiting them.

The Duchess was greeted with cheers.

"How do you do, little Mamma?" she asked, kissing Annie.

"I am so glad to see you again," replied her hostess, with an accent of sincerity that touched Madame de Blanzac.

When all the greetings were over, Annie took her guest away to show her the rooms she had arranged for her with special care.

"And now, you must show me your son and heir," said Christiane, taking off her hat and coat.

"Now, at once?"

"Now, at once."

Annie rang and asked for the baby to be brought in.

"It is fortunate that your first child should be a son."

"Oh, if I had had a daughter, I should never have dared to show my face again," answered the young mother.

The English nurse arrived, carrying a little bundle of muslin, lace, and ribbons, from which a tiny fluffy head emerged.

"Here is my little masterpiece," said Annie, placing the sleeping baby on the Duchess's lap.

Christiane was deeply affected by the sight of

Jacques' child. She put her arm round it, in a timid, awkward way and then, with her eyes dim with tears, she kissed the soft, fair hair, the eyelids fringed with dark lashes and the little, fresh mouth, with lingering kisses.

"He is very beautiful," she said, in an unsteady voice.

"Yes, is he not? He does me credit, for I am nursing him."

These words caused the Duchess sudden joy, and the shame she felt at herself made the colour come into her face.

"And your husband allows you to nurse him?"

"Allows me? Why, he was very glad indeed. He thanks me again and again, every day. He declares that he kisses his child with all the more pleasure, because he knows that only he and I—in fact, a lot of French nonsense," said Annie breaking off and colouring slightly. "He did not ask me to nurse Baby. I wanted to myself. The little rogue deprives me of all kinds of pleasure, but I shall never regret it."

Madame de Blanzac kissed the child again, with a lingering caress.

"He smells so good."

"I should think so; his clothes are all scented with *Iris de Florence.*"

"No, I do not mean that, he is all milk and honey," explained the Duchess, sniffing the child as though he were a flower.

"That is just what Jacques says. What a lot of imagination you all have!" added Annie, rather jeeringly.

She then took the baby up again gently and sent him away with his nurse.

"I hope I do not look too much like a nurse," she said.

"Like a nurse? You look much younger than last year."

"So much the better."

Tea was then brought for the Duchess, and Annie poured it for her. They talked about all that had happened since they had last met.

"And so you like Blonay?" asked Christiane.

"I love it. It is a dear old place. I felt at home here from the very day I arrived. Neither its size nor its severe style alarmed me. It was rather strange, for I had never seen a château before. There is one thing that seems terribly difficult, though, and that is my rôle of lady of the manor. I do not know how I shall get on. I am determined to do my best, though. The house is not quite finished yet, so you must make allowances. We shall have several of your friends; the Keradieus are coming back, and Monsieur de Nozay and Monsieur de Challans are to be here to-morrow."

"I am glad you have invited Louis. It will make up to him for not going to Deauville this summer."

Annie rose.

"I hope you will not be bored," she said smiling, "and that you will like Blonay. I am going to leave you now, as you must want to rest. You have two good hours before luncheon, which will be at half-past one. *Au revoir.*"

CHAPTER XI

THE invitations to Blonay, this year, were necessarily limited in number. The Marquis had endeavoured to make up by the quality of his guests. In order to have a right proportion of youth, gaiety, and intelligence, he had weighed things over, and tried to have congenial spirits. He had discussed the various *pros* and *cons* of suggested visitors. Annie, who was present during this little work of selection, exclaimed, in a tone of distress: "How complicated everything is in Europe and how particular you are!" Jacques wanted this first assembly of guests, destined to arouse the echoes of Blonay, to be both a friendly and brilliant one. He had invited his nearest relatives and his most faithful and agreeable friends. It seemed as though the old château had been aroused by a magician's wand, for it now teemed with life, from base to summit. Up and down the main staircase, out on the terraces, and in the avenues of the park, women's graceful figures were to be seen. In the wide courtyard, there were joyful departures for the chase and triumphal returns, whilst, in the evenings, music, dance tunes, beautiful voices, and gay conversation filled the old house with harmony and gaiety.

Annie had never confessed to any one, not even to her husband, how much she had dreaded her duties as hostess. The idea of having to receive people she did

not know well, foreigners, too, who would criticise her American ways, had made her feel very nervous. If she should not succeed in making things go and their guests should find Blonay dull, then Jacques would be vexed and disappointed. It was this that she really feared more than anything else.

After the first five or six days, she was able to breathe freely again. Her guests were all thoroughly enjoying themselves; there was no doubt about that. The expression on the Duchess's face quite satisfied Annie on that score, for she had never seen her look so animated and she had never seen her so brilliant. She did not notice how feverish and fitful her friend's gaiety was, and she took for a sign of enjoyment that radiance which love diffuses over the human face.

When Christiane had met the Marquis again after a separation of four months, she had felt, intuitively, that he was restored to her. She had had the impression of a barrier having given way, of a union rather than a reunion. She did not seek to know by what charm, or by what miracle, communication had once more been set up between them. All that she knew was that she was thoroughly happy. The presence of Jacques created for her an atmosphere of Paradise, and the certainty of having reconquered him put an expression of triumphant joy into her eyes.

From the time that he was once settled at Blonay, Jacques d'Anguilhon had begun to think of the Duchess's approaching visit. He was impatient to show her his home, the home which revealed so glorious a past, and he rejoiced at the thought of doing the honours of it. His wish to see her again was increased by a touch of vanity rather than anything else. Then, Annie, who had kept up a regular corre-

spondence with Christiane, unfortunately gave him her letters to read. He took them to his own rooms and they produced a strange effect on his imagination. Their brilliant and original style, their subtle perfume, the large, elegant, and irregular handwriting and, perhaps, the transmission of one of those still unknown fluids, which are the secret agents of Providence, made the image of the Duchess stand out clearly in his mind. He saw the beautiful outline of her figure, her large blue eyes, the deeply-marked corners of her mouth, and all the characteristic traits that he admired so much. This vision of her disturbed his mind greatly and a more ardent wish to see her again took possession of him. He felt, all at once, that he had a hundred things to tell her, she attracted him irresistibly and, over and over again, he was tempted to start off to Deauville, where she then was. He was seized with the idea that she might break her promise and, as he had told her, he had an intuition of her reluctance. The communication between them had certainly been re-established.

She came and her presence was, for him, a source of exquisite joy and emotion. He showed her all the nooks and corners of Blonay. They strolled together through the long galleries, stopping from time to time in some window recess to admire the mountains of the Puy-de-Dôme, or a fine sunset. They looked through curious books together and they turned over the sketches and engravings in the portfolios. He told her stories of his childhood and youth which he had never thought of telling to his wife. There was a fair share of vanity and frivolity in the composition of this man and of this woman of the world, but they both had a great deal of the inner life, too. They

frequently soared away to the unknown, reaching rather dangerous heights sometimes and then, startled, they would quickly return to earth and would take refuge in the commonplace. These ascents, which always had a disturbing effect on them, had also a great charm. In their frequent conversations, their thoughts and ideas met and each one left, in the other one's soul, some fragment of him or herself. Like all mortals here below, they were working out their destinies.

The Duchess was an intellectual woman of the sensual type. With her, love mounted from the senses to the heart. With women of another type, it descends from the heart to the senses. She would never have been able to love a man of an inferior race. Jacques had the same qualities as the Duke de Blanzac and he was, comparatively, a young man. Now that Christiane saw him with this superb setting of Blonay to show off his personality, and with all the authority and prestige of a *grand seigneur,* he seemed to her a veritable king among men, and his image took possession of her, body and soul. She almost forgot that he belonged to another. The difference of nationality put so great a distance between the Marquis and his wife, that she could not think of them as married. She felt grateful to Annie for being so silent about her happiness and for not showing her claims on her husband. This made her own suffering more bearable, so that the friendship she felt for Jacques' wife was quite sincere.

Christiane quite realised the danger of the intimacy which had sprung up between herself and the Marquis, but she braved it and even delighted in it. Jacques was unconscious of it. He felt so exceedingly happy

that, at times, he was alarmed and said to himself that it could not possibly last. It was, of course, not destined to last. When human happiness reaches a certain point, it either vanishes suddenly, or commences slowly to decrease. That of the Marquis d'Anguilhon had reached this point.

One morning, just before luncheon, Jacques was returning home with Henri de Keradieu. As they turned the bend of the avenue and came within view of the terrace, they saw Madame de Blanzac and the Count de Challans pacing up and down it.

Baron de Keradieu stopped short and, looking at them, said to Jacques:

"I fancy that will end by marriage."

These simple words, apparently so unimportant, were destined to have enormous consequences. They seemed to strike Jacques' heart and brain simultaneously.

"A marriage!" he repeated, looking at the two figures. "The Duchess and Challans? Impossible!"

"Why? She has been trying to play the sister to that fine-looking fellow, and it is quite possible that she has fallen in love with him."

"But she is five years older than he is. It would be a ridiculous marriage!"

"Oh, no; Louis looks older than he is and he is much more serious than people think, and absolutely straightforward. As to her, she will always look the age she wants to look. I assure you that if she should tell me of her engagement, I should congratulate her heartily."

"Well, I should not," said the Marquis, drily.

The two men continued their walk in silence. On entering the hall, Jacques looked at his watch.

"We have still an hour before luncheon," he said. "I must leave you, as I have some letters to write."

Under this pretext, he went up to his room. Feeling the need of being quite alone with himself, he turned the key of the door, instinctively, and then began pacing up and down, as he always did when under the influence of some mental agitation. The idea of the Duchess caring for Louis de Challans, in that way, was absurd, he said to himself. Why, he was only thirteen years of age when she was eighteen. She had known him from the time he wore his college coat and cap, so that he would not have a shadow of prestige for her. There was only one thing, though. She had married a man much older than herself. It was just possible now that she might be tempted by the fact that Louis was young. She always was a woman who went in for extremes. This marriage would enable her to keep her title, her wealth, her Blanzac kingdom as it were, and all the things that were her pride and her very life. Yes, it was possible and even probable. What was it to him after all? She was quite free and it ought not to affect him at all. And yet it did affect him and the idea of it was atrociously painful to him. And—as usually happens—jealousy caused the love within him to make itself manifest.

Overcome by the shock of this discovery, he sank down into an armchair, clenching its two arms nervously. Why, of course he loved her and he always had loved her. In Jacques' suddenly-enlightened mind, a development of pictures, recollections, and sensations took place, similar to photographic development. Christiane Soria appeared before him with her short frock, her slender limbs, and her head always erect.

He remembered his delight in the old days when he happened to meet her and she deigned to bow graciously. Then, too, how he had liked that dancing-class to which she belonged! After all these long years, he still felt the delightful sensation he had then felt, when the girlish form he held drew itself up as though to escape him. Curiously enough, he could see again the thick plait of tawny hair hanging down her back. He remembered how it ended in a frizzy tuft which glinted prettily when it caught the light. That plait used to fascinate him. It looked very heavy and he had been curious to know its weight. One Sunday, when the little girl was just in front of him in the aisle at St. Clotilde's, he had not been able to resist the temptation of touching the silky hair. He had just lifted it, very lightly, with the tips of his fingers, but not lightly enough for Christiane not to have felt it. She had turned round quickly, like a little Fury, and had given him a withering glance. Was he not, even then, in love with her? Were not their destinies already united? And then the indignation and anger he had felt on her wedding-day, when he had seen her coming down the nave of St. Clotilde's on the arm of the Duke de Blanzac! Was not that jealousy?

All the women he had cared for since had reminded him more or less of Christiane. He had always been looking for her in the others. Jacques remembered how much he had disliked asking the Duchess to help him with his marriage. His marriage! At the thought of this, he coloured violently, rose, and began once more to pace up and down the room. Had he not cared for Annie then?

"Yes," he said to himself, "he had cared for her, very sincerely, but the feeling he had for her had not

been able to efface his first impressions and had not prevented his love for the Duchess from developing and making itself manifest. This then was what his suffering was to be. This was the suffering by which he was to pay for the fortune that had been restored to him."

"If only Christiane would not marry again! He should never call her his and he would never breathe a word of love to her. He would be heroic. But to see her, a second time, come away from the altar on another man's arm would be more than he could bear."

A ray of hope flashed through Jacques' mind. Henri was perhaps mistaken. It was true that Louis de Challans was frequently at Christiane's and that she always invited him to Deauville and to Blanzac. She was greatly interested in his future and showed a marked liking for him. But then, he was her husband's heir, the future head of the Blanzac family. Was she not bound to watch over him and to help him to prepare for the part he had to play in the world? If she really cared for Louis, would Jacques not have felt it instinctively? Would not Guy de Nozay also have divined it?

"Ah, I was too happy!" murmured the Marquis, through his clenched teeth. "It could not last, of course."

From that moment, Jacques had no more tranquillity. The delightful peacefulness he had been enjoying for a whole year was over for ever. He eagerly endeavoured to find out the truth about Christiane's feelings for Louis de Challans. This was by no means easy. It may have been that the Duchess de Blanzac felt that Guy de Nozay's suspicions were aroused and that she wanted to put him off the scent, or it may

have been that she was endeavouring to keep herself from thinking so much about Jacques, but certain it is that she was with Louis a great deal. He amused and interested her, for he was really young at heart, full of enthusiasm and illusions. Then, too, she was not indifferent to the sincere admiration he had for her. At times, her way of acting seemed quite to justify Monsieur de Keradieu's surmises, and then Jacques suffered cruelly. He was often tempted to question Christiane, but he did not dare. At such times, he would look at her with an expression in his eyes that was most embarrassing for her. It was as though he were trying to read the very depths of her soul. When their eyes met they both experienced a sort of shock, and it was only a wonder that they did not betray themselves.

For some time, Christiane had felt that Jacques loved her. The conviction of this gave her such happiness that she desired nothing more. She was not long in discovering that Jacques was conscious of his love for her. At first, she was rather alarmed, but she consoled herself with the thought that the marriage she had helped him to make put such a barrier between them that neither of them would think of breaking through it.

The day before her departure, Madame de Blanzac was coming down the main staircase, talking gaily to the Viscount de Nozay. Suddenly she uttered a cry. Through the open door of the hall, she had just caught sight of two of the stable men, carrying the Marquis stretched out on one of the garden seats. His eyes were closed and he was pale, as though mortally wounded. Christiane was at his side just as the men were setting the chair down.

"An accident?" asked Guy, in an agitated tone of voice.

Jacques opened his eyes and tried to smile.

"A kick from a horse. I fancy my knee is broken."

"Are you suffering much?" asked the Duchess, with a look full of sympathy and an intonation of infinite tenderness.

"Atrociously."

A spasm of pain contorted his features as he spoke.

"Some brandy, quick!" ordered the Viscount.

As soon as Jacques had revived a little after the brandy, he said:

"My Mother and Annie should be told, so that they may not be suddenly alarmed."

"I will tell them," said the Duchess, at once.

She went away, with a pang at her heart and her limbs trembling, feeling herself the suffering of the man she loved.

The doctor, who was fortunately at home, pronounced that the knee was not fractured. He ordered ice and bandaged it, gave an injection of morphia, and left everyone very much comforted as to the consequences of the accident.

As soon as she had recovered from her emotion, Christiane was sure that she had betrayed herself. At the bare idea that the Viscount de Nozay, and perhaps Jacques, had guessed her secret, her face flushed crimson. A moment later, she lifted her head again proudly, for she felt capable of putting both Guy and Jacques off the scent.

The patient suffered a great deal during the night. He was very feverish, too, and even slightly delirious at times. In his quiet moments, he recalled the Duchess's cry and the look of anguish he had seen in

her eyes. These things, registered as they were in his brain and in his very soul, produced a joy which dominated his physical pain.

The next day, he was carried into his study in order to wish Christiane good-bye. She was in travelling costume and quite ready to start.

"I frightened you," he said, looking at her eagerly and endeavouring to find some sign of emotion on her face.

"Frightened me?" she repeated. "I should just think you did. If I had been a weak woman, I should have fainted. Only imagine my fright, I thought you were dead."

Then, all in the same breath, Christiane expressed her regret at the accident, adding that she was glad to see he was better before leaving. She went on to say how much she had enjoyed her visit, and all this in the most easy and natural way imaginable.

Guy de Nozay, who was present, could not help looking at her with admiration.

"She is really very clever, very clever indeed," he said to himself. "It is remarkably well acted."

When Jacques heard the sound of the carriage wheels, which were taking the Duchess away, he put his head back on the pillow and closed his eyes.

"How I love her!" he murmured to himself.

The Marquis did not get up again as soon as was expected. For about a fortnight he had to lie still, and for the next three weeks he walked with difficulty.

Christiane's absence was a great trouble to him. Involuntarily, when the door opened, he expected to see her appear. The house with his wife, his mother, and his friends, seemed empty, horribly empty. He realised that poverty was not the worst kind of suffer-

ing. He had never believed this until now. In his present state of mind, nothing could have been worse for him than the inactivity to which he was doomed. It gave him time and opportunity for long reveries and for searching his memory for impressions that were registered there. At times, a light burst forth from among the treasures of his recollections, and the light dazzled him. Madame de Blanzac loved him. He would not have dared say so, in words, even to himself, but he felt it. His heart, at such times, would beat more quickly, and he would stretch out his arms, instinctively, towards his vision and murmur, in a low voice, Christiane's name. It gave him the most delicious joy to utter that name now.

CHAPTER XII

After the Christmas festivities, the Marquis and Marchioness left for Cannes.

The Duchess had asked them to stop at Blanzac for a few days, on the way. Jacques declined, under the pretext of the child.

Annie was delighted to be back again in the beautiful Château de St. Michel, which had been the first halting-place of her wedding trip. It seemed droll to be returning there with a baby.

The Marquis thought regretfully of the unmixed happiness he had felt, only the year before, in this place. The memories of the honeymoon and the sight of his healthy and handsome little son drove the vision of Christiane from his mind for a time, but it quickly came back again, more clearly and more brilliant than ever, effacing everything else.

The Marquis made very real efforts to kill this love, which rendered him liable to commit some infamy. He clung to Annie, trying by means of familiar conversations, and even by certain confidences, to get into closer communion with her. This attempt had the disastrous result of showing him how little his wife and he really had in common. He was both surprised and discouraged.

At his own request, Annie talked to him in English.

This seemed to give her a special charm and a certain piquancy, but, on the other hand, it made her all the more foreign to him. He was always thinking, and frequently quite erroneously, that she did not understand him and that she could not understand him. The Marquis needed to be amused and interested. Annie chattered a great deal, but she could not talk. She studied music and played correctly, but her hard and brilliant execution gave Jacques no pleasure. She had no idea of the art of making herself desired, of giving value to her caresses. Conjugal flirtation, peculiar, perhaps, only to the Frenchwoman, would have seemed ridiculous to her. For her own dignity's sake, she would not have taken a single step for the sake of keeping her husband faithful to her. Faithfulness was a question of loyalty and honour, in her opinion. She had married a gentleman and she took it for granted that he was incapable of deceiving her. Before her marriage, she had been more afraid of this French inconstancy, with which people had tried to terrify her, than of anything else. Now, curiously enough, she no longer feared it. From time to time, she had certainly had an intuition that she was not enough for Jacques, but he had always been able to reassure her. She had never been so tranquil and so sure as now, when, through nursing her child, she was doubly disarmed.

When a sick man knows the nature of the disease from which he is suffering, he is, in spite of himself, constantly thinking about it, and this very preoccupation aggravates the disease. Ever since Jacques had realised that he loved Madame de Blanzac, he had not been able to forget her for a single instant. This constant thought increased his love for her and every

effort he made to drive her image from his heart only fixed it more deeply there.

The Duchess usually spent February and March at Cannes. She decided this year to go to Pau. The Marquis thought he was sincerely dreading her arrival, but he was intensely disappointed when she did not come, although he tried to persuade himself that it was all for the best. He wondered why she should have gone to Pau, as he knew she detested the place. The idea that she cared for him and that she wanted to avoid him took possession of him. He remembered her cry when she had thought him dead. It was not a nervous woman's cry, but that of a woman who sees a loved one suddenly taken away from her. Why should she not love him, he asked himself. It was very certain that he loved her. Excited with all these ideas, he was seized with a wild desire to rush off to Pau and to see Madame de Blanzac, without being seen himself; so that he might read her face. In the very midst of the emotion caused by this idea, he realised the danger of their love, if she really cared for him. He resolved to put no obstacles whatever in the way of the visit to America, and he even proposed to his wife that they should start towards the end of April. Annie was delighted, as she had been afraid that the child might prevent the plan from being carried out. She wrote at once to her mother and to Clara, announcing their approaching departure, but Clara replied that she should not believe it until she saw them land in New York.

The Duchess did not stay long in the Pyrenees, and on the eighth of March she was back in Paris. When Jacques knew that she was in the Rue de Varenne, he was seized with a sort of restlessness, vague at first,

but which became quite painful. At the hour when he knew that her gates would be open for her daily reception, he could not keep still and was like a captive animal, fretted by his chain.

Madame de Blanzac wrote regularly to Annie. In one of her letters, she told her that Louis de Challans had been transferred to a regiment stationed at Versailles.

"I am glad to have him near Paris," she added. "Beside the fact that he is one of those on whom I can absolutely rely, he is so delightfully young always."

This piece of news, together with the comment on it, upset Jacques again. He said to himself that he was a fool and an idiot, and that Henri de Keradieu had more perspicacity. But the certainty that Christiane cared for him came back to him again and, in the end, he concluded that she was going to marry again in order to avoid and forget him.

"It is only women who have such abominable ideas!" he muttered, through his clenched teeth. "She will forget me soon enough when she is in the arms of this fine fellow of twenty-five, whom she thinks so delightfully young," he added, in an angry, ironical tone. Louis was just five years younger than he was, and he was more jealous, at this moment, about the five years than he would have been of any talent or even genius. Physical jealousy, the most painful and blind of all jealousies, made him forget Christiane's refinement and her loftiness of soul. He was supposing her capable of wanting to kill sentiment by sensuality.

Jacques felt a desperate longing to know the truth. He could not start for America with these doubts torturing him. He would question the Duchess. He was

tempted to go to Paris by himself, but he felt the need of the protection of his wife and child, and so decided to take them with him. Under the pretext of having some business affairs to arrange before leaving Europe, he shortened the time fixed for their stay at the Château de St. Michel.

CHAPTER XIII

Madame de Blanzac had been as much disturbed in her mind lately as the Marquis d'Anguilhon. The time was not far distant when their lives were to be blended together, and they had already commenced to feel, to suffer, and to live, in unison. Everything contributed to bring them nearer to each other, even the very things which seemed more likely to keep them apart. Christiane had gone away to escape the danger, and now that she was back in Paris, she had to face it. She had not expected to see the Anguilhons again until the beginning of April. When Annie wrote to her that they were returning to Paris, her intuition told her that they were coming back because she was there. As soon as Jacques arrived, she felt his presence through walls and space, and this presence acted on her like magnetism. Her heart beat more quickly, her face flushed with emotion, and a kind of inward trepidation prevented her from reading or interesting herself in anything. Towards two o'clock, she was seized with a sudden, instinctive fear. She decided that she would not see Jacques that day, and she said to herself that she did not want to see him. She rang the bell to give orders that she was not at home that afternoon to visitors and, when the footman appeared, she asked—for a glass of water.

The Marquis, too, was under the influence of an

equally violent emotion. Now that he was actually near Madame de Blanzac, he was afraid to question her. He was greatly relieved to find that Annie had invited the Keradieus to luncheon and to know that this fact would necessarily delay his visit a little. The presence of these friends did him good, as, in talking with them, he was obliged to interest himself in other subjects and, consequently, became a little more calm.

During luncheon, Annie said that she had some scruples about this journey to America, as she rather feared it for the baby.

"If he were a little Yankee," she added, "I would take him from one end of the world to the other, but I do not know how this little Franco-American specimen of humanity will stand the change of climate. I shall not start without the doctor's permission."

On hearing these words, Jacques felt something very much like joy.

When the two men were alone in the library, the Marquis asked Baron de Keradieu news of Louis de Challans.

"He is very glad to have left La Fère, of course. We dined together, last week, at Madame de Blanzac's."

"You still think he is going to marry her?"

"I do, more than ever."

"Ah," said Jacques, his face hidden by the smoke of his cigar.

It would have been too painful to continue talking on that subject, so he said no more about it. Jacques thought that by going late to call on the Duchess, he would be more likely to find her alone. He was determined to know the truth about Louis de Challans. He promised himself, though, and mentally vowed,

that he would ask nothing else and that he would not let her guess his own feelings.

When Jacques arrived at the Duchess de Blanzac's, the gates were just being closed, so it was evident that he was the last visitor. The footman on duty in the hall showed him into the red drawing-room. Christiane had already gone upstairs.

On finding himself once more in this room, which he knew so well, he was moved as he had never been before. Now that he was in love, his senses entered into direct communion with all the things which belonged to Christiane and which seemed to contain something of her. The faint perfume in the air was delicious to him. He looked at the little sofa, on which she always sat. The cushions had kept the imprint of her shoulders and arms. There was the little desk at which she sat when attending to her social affairs, the old harpsichord on which she accompanied herself when she sang her exquisite little songs. He had *seen* all these things hundreds of times, but he now *felt* them, and they seemed sacred to him and wonderful. This phenomenon, which was wholly subjective, as it was produced by love and so not new to him, surprised him as though he now experienced it all for the first time. All at once he started. In the mirror, above a side table placed in the corner, to the right of the French windows, he had just seen a little statue which appeared to have two heads.

"What is it?" he exclaimed and, on going up to it, he was struck by the strangeness of the work of art he had before him. It was the statue of a woman, of medium height, slenderly and delicately built. It was not carved in marble, but modelled in flesh-coloured

wax. Standing in front of it, one saw a lovely, almost childlike face, with a joyful, triumphant expression. This face, though, was only a mask, which the woman was holding up with her hand. It was cleverly draped by a veil, behind which was the real face. The head was thrown slightly back, the eyes were closed and looked as though they were full of tears, the mouth was rigid, with an expression of pain and sorrow. The right hand was tightly clenched and was holding the folds of the garment over the breast. The effect was very striking. Below, on the rather high plinth, was the word *Addolorata,* and, on the two sides, Baudelaire's lines:

Demain, après-demain, et toujours! comme nous!
Elle pleure, parce qu'elle a vécu
Et parce qu'elle vit; mais, ce qu'elle déplore
Surtout, ce qui la fait frémir jusqu'aux genoux,
C'est que demain, hélas! il faudra vivre encore.

Jacques stooped to read the words and he read them aloud. On lifting his head again, he saw the Duchess before him, in the mirror. She looked taller and thinner and strangely pale. As if hypnotised, without moving a step towards her, he watched her come forward, in the dignified way peculiar to her. He did not turn until she was at his side. Then, their hands, their eyes, and their very souls met, and, paralysed by their emotion, they stood still for a few seconds, unable to utter a word.

Christiane was the first to come to herself again. The quivering of her lips died away in a smile.

"You were admiring my *Addolorata?*" she said.

"Yes, and it gave me a pang at my heart. That

woman is suffering horribly. Whose is this masterpiece?"

"It is by Ringel."

"But the idea was yours, I am sure?"

The Duchess changed colour and could not meet Jacques' eyes.

"Oh, no," she replied, promptly. "About two years ago, when I was crossing the Tuileries gardens, one morning, I was suddenly brought to a standstill by Christolphe's statue, *The Mask*. You have never noticed it probably. It is a woman holding a mask, like this one. Her head is thrown back and there is an expression of such heart-rending grief on her face, that I felt the deepest pity and affection for her. I should have liked to take the statue away from that public garden. It seemed to me that she must suffer from the gaze of the crowd. I have been several times to look at her again, for she fascinated me in the strangest way. A few days after first noticing her—you see how things are linked together—I was looking through one of Baudelaire's books, and I came across some lines which that same statue had inspired. The poet's vision was more ideally beautiful than that of the sculptor had been, and I was seized with the wish to have the poet's vision. I went to Ringel, for I fancied he would be able to reproduce it for me better than any one else. In his works, there is not only a seeking after beauty, but an endeavour to interest the soul. We worked together at the rough model and we both had the same idea: a worldly *Addolorata*. We are quite satisfied with our mask and I only wish that Baudelaire could have seen it."

Jacques turned the statue sideways and stepped

back. An expression of surprise came over his voice.

"She is like you," he said, in a low tone.

The Duchess was embarrassed and made an effort to laugh.

"That is what Monsieur de Nozay says," she remarked. "You are the only ones to notice it."

"Because we have a more delicate perception, probably, than your ordinary friends."

"At any rate, if the resemblance does exist, which I deny, it is quite accidental. I should not have posed for a woman wearing a mask. To do so would either be a piece of affectation or a confession, and I am incapable of such bad taste."

"I know that very well. Then, too, the resemblance is almost imperceptible. I *feel* it, rather than see it. It is more in the general lines. If this woman could walk, she would move as you do. She belongs to the same type of woman as you."

The Marquis ran his fingers lightly over the wonderful undulations of the *Addolorata's* body, as he said this.

Christiane thrilled from head to foot, as though she felt the touch herself.

"The statue is for my own private study, which is just undergoing a few repairs and alterations. I am glad you have seen it, though. Now, come and tell me all the news," added the Duchess, in a firmer tone, leading the way to the other end of the room.

She took her accustomed place on the sofa and pointed to an armchair for the Marquis.

"How are Annie and Baby?" she asked.

Jacques did not hear. The sight of the woman wearing a mask had disturbed his mind strangely. Not

only did he see the physical likeness, but, by a sudden intuition, he had identified the statue with its original. He was sure that she was wearing a mask and that she had some secret, some hidden love in her life. His jealousy revived and was urged on to try to lift the veil he had intended to respect. The burning question rose to his lips, but he was afraid, afraid lest the Duchess, at his first word, should, in the firm, haughty way he knew so well, put on an impassive expression and conceal from him her soul. He little knew how her heart was hungering for tenderness and how she longed for a few words of love from his lips. He hesitated to speak, and Christiane, troubled by his silence, questioned him with a wavering look in her eyes.

"Is it true," he asked her, in a changed voice, "that you are thinking of marrying again and that you are going to marry Challans?"

The astonishment that these words caused Madame de Blanzac brought her to herself effectually.

"Who can have told you that?" she asked.

"No matter who told me," answered the Marquis brusquely. "Is it true?"

"True? No, a thousand times no!"

On hearing this emphatic denial, Jacques' face expressed such joy, that the Duchess was again confused.

"I like Louis very much indeed, as a friend," she said, "and I think the liking is mutual. I should never have imagined, though, that any one could have mistaken our friendship for love. And *you* believed in this ridiculous marriage? You?——"

"Yes, because I know that the most improbable things nearly always happen, and especially those that one dreads most. I am glad that this is not true. It

seems to me that I have just roused after a nightmare," continued Jacques, drawing in a long breath. "I shall be able to go away in peace, now," he added.

"Go away? Are you going away?"

"Yes, to America, at the end of April. I have promised Mrs. Villars to take Annie to see them all. I must keep my promise."

The news of this trip to America, for which she had not been prepared, made Christiane turn pale, and a look of sorrow came into her eyes, betraying her a second time. Jacques' heart beat fast, as in hours of victory. In the midst of his exultation, he distinctly heard the voice of his conscience bidding him stop. How could he stop, though, when he felt that the psychological moment had just come for the Duchess and that he had her in his power! In order to stop at such a moment, it would have needed virtue that he did not possess and that none of the Anguilhon men had ever possessed. He drew nearer to the Duchess and, in a caressing voice, that seemed to penetrate her and make her feel that she was wrapped from head to foot in the magnetic fluid emanating from him, he said in a very low tone:

"You do not ask me *why* I am glad that you are free."

Christiane recoiled with an instinctive movement of fear.

"Do not be afraid," said the Marquis, very gently.

"I am not afraid," answered Madame de Blanzac, drawing herself up proudly. "Why should I be afraid?"

"Because you know that I love you," answered the Marquis.

And then, feeling that he would have to violate this

woman's heart, if he were to have her secret, he added boldly:

"And because you know that you love me too."

The Duchess could not turn paler than she already was, but her eyes flashed and her delicate nostrils dilated with anger. She endeavoured to brave the ardent gaze fixed on her. Her eyelids quivered; she wanted to protest, but not a sound could she utter.

The Marquis took Christiane's hands and held them in his, clasping his own over them.

"Deny it, if you can," he said, with that accent of authority which always won for him what he wanted.

For a few seconds, Madame de Blanzac looked at this man's face raised towards her own. The love which emanated from it penetrated her through and through and her resistance gave way entirely.

"I cannot," she answered.

She made this confession, with head erect, tears in her eyes, and quivering lips, like a woman conquered by the higher will incarnated in her own heart. The Marquis bent and kissed the hands he held, gently and almost humbly.

"My whole life for those words," he said, absolutely forgetting his wife, his child, and all his other vows.

Then with that fine emotion caused by love in his voice, which always touches a woman so deeply, he told her that he had always loved her, that he had never loved any one but her. He told her how this love, which he had always had within him, had manifested itself. He told her of his struggle, of his suffering. He acknowledged himself vanquished and happy to be vanquished.

"I was afraid that you were thinking of marrying again for the sake of putting a second barrier between

us. I was afraid—and you can never imagine how afraid I was—of losing you."

The Duchess drank in these words. The love which she no longer tried to hide gave to her face a divine light and gentleness. In his wildest dreams, Jacques had never seen her so transfigured.

"And you thought me capable of marrying Louis, or indeed any one, knowing that I loved you?" said Christiane, in a reproachful tone. "It would have been an unworthy thing to do."

"How could I help it? Jealousy gives us frightful hallucinations. Yes, it was mad, for we were made for each other. God must have said, when he created us: 'This man for this woman.'"

The Duchess's face darkened over.

"And then He separated us!" she said with an expression of intense bitterness.

"Because it requires obstacles, and even sorrow, for producing really great love," answered the Marquis in a grave voice, deeply moved.

"Oh, I wish I could believe that our destinies are foreordained."

"Believe it, for it is the truth."

"I know, at least, that you came into my life without my will having anything to do with it at all. You were sent to me—yes, sent. I took for friendship what was love. I was blind, or rather blinded till the day when you came to tell me of your engagement."

The Duchess's voice failed her, as she said this.

"And I never guessed anything of all this!" exclaimed Jacques. "And I thought my perception so keen. I put your nerves and your sudden coldness, at times, to an instinct of coquetry. I must have made you suffer horribly," he added, sorrowfully. "Forgive

me my stupidity and my unconscious cruelty. I did not know, I really did not know."

"Of course you did not know. I, too, was wearing a mask," said the Duchess, glancing at the *Addolorata*. "Oh, I fought hard against you and against myself. You and I were as one then, so that it was a formidable struggle for me. I had noticed Christolphe's statue a week before you came to talk to me about your marriage. The impression it had made on me was simply the presentiment of my own lot."

"From henceforth, Christiane, your mask will hide nothing but happiness," said Jacques, in a tender, passionate tone.

The Duchess shook her head.

"Happiness?" she repeated. "All forbidden fruit is poisonous. You know that as well as I do."

"What does that matter, as long as we die together?"

"Ah, but that is just it. We shall not die together."

"You shall never suffer through me. I give you my word for that."

"It will be through the force of things, the laws that we violate."

"Well, then, knowing this, would you, even if you could, give up loving me now?" asked the Marquis, holding Christiane under the spell of his ardent gaze.

"No, I would not," she answered.

Deeply affected, Jacques kissed the hands passionately that were lying in his.

"And you are glad that I have dragged this secret from you, the secret that was yours alone?" he insisted.

"I am very glad."

"Ah, I shall never have the courage to go away now," said Jacques.

Christiane's lips twitched with anguish.

"You must," she said. "Whatever may be the distance between us now, we shall nevermore be separated."

"But before going, my darling, I want to kneel at your feet and assure you of my love and adoration. Can I not come some day to your Villa de la Rosette, where you are more really at home than here?"

The Duchess turned pale again and drew her hands suddenly away. Like all women of pronounced individuality, she rebelled, instinctively, on feeling a man's yoke on her neck.

"Let you come to La Rosette?" she repeated, shuddering from head to foot. "Later on—when I can arrange it."

Then, seeing the sorrowful look on Jacques' face at her somewhat haughty tone, she smiled gently.

"Do not be afraid," she said, in a tender voice. "I shall never change. Be generous, though, and let me have time to come to myself again. Now, go——"

She rose somewhat unsteadily to her feet, as she spoke. The Marquis had the greatest difficulty to refrain from taking her in his arms, so beautiful did she look to him in the intoxication of his passionate love. The sound of footsteps and the entrance of the footman, brought him to himself. Neither Jacques nor the Duchess would have wished to exchange their first kiss in this open drawing-room.

"I adore you," murmured the Marquis, as his leave-taking.

"And I love you," answered Christiane, in the same way.

With these words, they separated, as closely and absolutely united, as though they really belonged to each other.

And so Annie was betrayed, as every Marchioness d'Anguilhon had been.

CHAPTER XIV

THE Duchess had kept La Rosette, the estate on the Sèvres road which her father had bought for her and which had been her out-door nursery. She had not only kept it, but she had enlarged and beautified it, and she often said that it was the most precious to her of all her possessions.

Her nurse, Toni, still lived in the comfortable cottage, which served as the lodge. Christiane's foster-brother, who was a well-educated and intelligent farmer, cultivated the land and managed the estate, which, in his hands, was doing very well.

The villa was entirely surrounded with flowers and was separated from the road and from the farm by a kind of English garden, the trees of which had been so well chosen and so admirably planted that they gave the illusion of a large park. By covering the outer walls with ivy and climbing plants, and by having some of the walls knocked down inside the house, and the staircase altered, Madame de Blanzac had taken away the commonplace look and made a charming home for herself.

She went nearly every day to La Rosette. Sometimes she spent the whole morning there and only returned to the Rue de Varenne for her reception. Toni always prepared a dainty lunch for her and waited at table herself. At times, Christiane felt the

need of these little motherly attentions. This woman, who possessed so many things, and who was surrounded by friends and admirers, was very poor and very solitary. She had neither husband, children, nor near relatives. Her uncle and her nurse were all she had to count on in the way of family affection. She was fully conscious of her isolation and it grieved her. In the spring, she often invited her most intimate friends to her villa, but only her intimate friends. She would not, upon any account, have indifferent people, or those who were not congenial to her, in this retreat, so full of her dearest memories.

It was here then that she was to know the joy of love. By one of those ironies, so frequent in the history of people and nations, which prove the blindness of mortals, Baron Soria, himself, had bought and prepared the nest which was to shelter the guilty love of his daughter—the love that was to end in her death.

A week after the avowal that Jacques had wrung from her, Christiane arrived at La Rosette, looking very pale. She was very nervous and, evidently, under the influence of some violent emotion. Toni went with her to her room, as usual, to help her to change her dress. Just as she was going away again, her mistress, who was seated at her dressing-table, said to her, in a dry, haughty tone, without looking at her:

"Toni, a friend of mine will be coming to see me sometimes here. I do not wish his visits to be spoken of. You understand?"

Toni understood so well, that she stood still, as though petrified. Her eyes expressed her surprise and grief, and a blush of shame came over her wrinkled face. She went away slowly, without uttering a word. The blush, which Christiane had seen in the glass, and

the distressed silence which followed, troubled her much more than reproaches would have done. For the first time in her life, she felt humiliated and lowered in her own esteem. It hurt her pride to take Toni into her confidence about her *liaison,* but there seemed to be no alternative.

And so the Duchess was giving to Jacques, not only the magnificent gift of herself, but she was sacrificing to him that untarnished reputation which had hitherto been her force and her pride. No man is capable of understanding what this sacrifice means to a woman of high character.

. . . . . .

The Marquis d'Anguilhon and Madame de Blanzac had now been lovers for some time. They had known the splendour of that love, the germ of which is so deeply implanted in the human soul. The physical and moral affinities, which existed between them, united them as closely as possible and gave them divine communion with each other. For months and months, on separating, each was conscious of leaving in the heart of the other a still more passionate love. Earthly happiness can go no further than this.

Christiane's love was the most complete and intoxicating delight that the Marquis had ever known. It satisfied his mind and his senses. It was not only the Duchess, in the perfect development of her beauty that he possessed, but also the tawny-haired child, who had awakened the man within him, the young bride, coming down the nave of St. Clotilde's who had aroused his desire, and the inaccessible woman, who had always appeared to him on a pedestal. All these images, repeated over and over again in his brain, served to increase his passion. The idea that Christiane had

given herself to him, Christiane, who was so strong and who had such marked individuality, touched him deeply and, at the same time, made him exultant. A woman is no weight on a man's arm, but she frequently weighs heavily on his mind. All the women Jacques had loved hitherto, had, at times bored him, and he had felt suddenly nervous and wished he could get away from them. He never wanted to leave Christiane. She held him under a spell, as it were, not by using artifice, as she was too much in love herself for that, but by her real fascination, the gift she had of making herself liked, and of being interesting, a gift she possessed in a supreme degree.

Any one who is really superior is never long prostrated either by grief or pleasure. On leaving Jacques' arms, the Duchess's mind, endowed with great elasticity, soon recovered itself and she quickly regained her own personality. The Marquis was often perplexed by this and sometimes wondered whether he had been dreaming, or whether Christiane really was his. The languor of her eyes and the tender vibration of her voice soon convinced him, though, that it was not all a dream. He was intensely happy, but, except in the actual presence of Christiane, his happiness caused him suffering. In the midst of his delight, he felt the sting of remorse. Annie, with all her pleasant ways and her absolute confidence in him, was daily heaping coals of fire upon his head. It was all in vain that he clung to his theory of predestination and said to himself that his union with Christiane had been as inevitable as his union with Annie. He was ashamed of the part he was playing and ashamed of himself.

Jacques' love had given to the Duchess a happiness so new to her, and so intoxicating, that she had neither

felt regret, remorse, nor even jealousy. When she returned to Paris, after one of his visits to her villa, she would bury herself in the corner of her carriage and close her eyes, in order to retain more clearly all the impressions she had had, and these impressions produced an exultation that made her whole body feel light and herself full of joy. The fragrance of the flowers she always took back came up to her in whiffs and gave her the sensation of a last, delicious caress. She then met the Marquis out at receptions and balls, or at the theatre. The glances, full of memories and promises, that they exchanged, the furtive clasping of hands, the long waltzes they danced together, and the tender words murmured in a low voice increased her happiness and her passionate love. She was so supremely happy that Annie's existence did not interfere with her at all. The "Jacques" of whom the young wife spoke, whom she called "my husband" and whom she mixed up with all the prosaic details of her household, seemed to Christiane quite a different man from the one she loved. Under the influence of this sentiment, which gave a fulness to her life that she had never before experienced, her beauty acquired a brilliancy which struck all her friends, and a great gentleness came over her and within her. There was less haughtiness now in her manner. She was more affable, more kindly, and generous in the extreme. Her generosity indeed developed into prodigality. She gave away, as though hoping that her charity might cover her sin and obtain forgiveness for her happiness.

Dr. Moreau understood, only too well, what actuated her charity. He could have told the very day when she had become the Marquis d'Anguilhon's mistress.

He saw that she was still under the influence of love's intoxication; but he knew that the day would arrive when she would come to herself once more and that she would then suffer horribly. He often called to see her, under one pretext or another. The Duchess realised that he knew her secret. Just at first, his perspicacity had irritated her, but finally it was a sort of comfort to her to have this silent and discreet confidant. When he left her, after shaking hands affectionately, she always felt that she had in him a friend on whom she could absolutely rely.

With the Duchess, this intoxication lasted a whole year. She came to herself again gradually, but the love remained, a deep, violent, and passionate love. Christiane then began to suffer on account of various things. In the first place, there were the family ties which were such an obstacle between herself and Jacques, then the fragility of the bond which united them troubled her, and also their clandestine intercourse. She was even seized with a wild desire to become a mother. It was as though love had touched every chord in her being. The sight of a baby would bring tears to her eyes. She longed to have a son by Jacques, and delighted in picturing the child much more handsome than little Philippe. She dreamed of him day and night and imagined she saw him alive and smiling. She stretched out her arms to him and her arms embraced nothing but emptiness. Many women, and often the best ones, are doomed to embrace nothing but chimeras.

When Christiane's hallucination was over, she would blush and laugh, but with tears in her eyes. Every separation now made her suffer keenly. When she returned from her villa, the silence and loneliness of

her home in Paris made her shudder. She had to make a great effort to discharge all the duties of her every-day life, whilst thiuking, all the time, of Jacques.

On leaving Madame de Blanzac and returning home, the Marquis always found Annie, his child, and his mother. It was a bright, cheerful home, warm with affection. The tranquillity he found there was very pleasant and soothed his nerves. It gave him the same sensation as the little white roses, the "Bride's roses," with which he used to cool his cheeks, as a child. Then his business affairs, his club, and his horses took up a great deal of his time and attention. Christiane was his luxury and his passion, but she was not his whole life.

Woman was created for man, and not man for woman. This law, the cause of so many misunderstandings and of so much suffering, had always been comprehended by Christiane, and, before she had loved, she had thought it just. At present, it caused her great suffering, in spite of her reasoning and her will-power. An incident occurred, which showed Christiane clearly the source of her suffering, and which roused her effectually from the dream in which she had been living.

The Anguilhons had been spending the summer at Deauville. They had rented the same villa which Mrs. Villars had taken, three years previously. Jacques took a chill, while out shooting. He was extremely feverish and, for forty-eight hours, the doctors feared pneumonia.

Christiane then realised that the Marquis did not belong to her and that she was completely outside his life. He did not belong to her, and yet he was flesh of her flesh and soul of her soul. Her feet were ready

to take her to his bedside and her hands could have helped and soothed him, but she might not go to him. Annie alone had that right. Christiane saw her bending over him, perhaps kissing him. This vision made the most cruel and painful of all jealousies spring up in her heart, the jealousy of the mistress in the presence of the wife. She could not bring herself to ask Jacques' wife how he was; she always asked his mother. Her intense anxiety, and the constraint she was compelled to put upon herself, made her so strange and so unnatural, that Guy de Nozay, who was staying with the Anguilhons, had no longer, to his great sorrow, a doubt about her *liaison* with his friend. Several times, with the most admirable presence of mind and the most chivalrous devotion, he turned aside her imprudences and prevented her from betraying herself.

The day Jacques came downstairs for the first time, the Duchess happened to be there. When he entered the room, he looked first at her and was surprised to see no joy written upon her face. He was struck by the expression of deep suffering that he read there. Feeling very uneasy about this, he contrived to be alone with her for a few moments, and he then asked her what was the matter.

Christiane looked at him with eyes full of sadness.

"How can you ask me what is the matter?" she said, in a broken voice. "Have you not been ill, and I could not nurse you?"

"Is that it?" said the Marquis, smiling, and his whole face lighting up. "And so you would have liked to nurse me? Oh, you were not intended for the ugly things of life. A sick person is neither attractive nor pleasant. I should have been very sorry for you to have seen me when I was so feverish."

"You consider me then as a creature of luxury."

"Of great luxury, yes, and very, very precious," replied Jacques, tenderly.

A few weeks before, these words would have flattered her. After all the anguish she had been enduring, they hurt her and seemed like an insult. Her pride prevented her from showing what she felt and her intelligence prevented her from continuing the subject. The corners of her mouth, alone, indicated her disdain for the inferiority of men in matters of sentiment.

From that moment, Christiane felt the effects of the poison which, as she herself had said, is to be found in all forbidden fruit. It gradually penetrated through her flesh to her very soul, drove sleep away from her, made her face turn pale constantly, and changed all that was highest and best in her nature. She could no longer see Annie at the head of her own table without suffering keenly. The sight of little Philippe became dreadfully painful to her. The thought that all the luxury, which was Jacques' delight, was due to his wife, humiliated and irritated her. Curiosity seems to have been added to jealousy for the sake of making the latter even more cruel. Christiane felt a wild desire to know on what terms the husband and wife were and the precise character of their relations. She questioned Annie as far as discretion would permit and even went rather beyond its bounds. If her rival had been French, she would have suffered still more. Annie's love was as simple as it was deep, and its utter absence of exultation reassured the Duchess. She came to Annie in search of the solace she so sorely needed, and she neither owed her any grudge nor hated her personally.

Christiane loved and suffered with all the refinement

she had inherited from her mother and with all the force that had come to her from her father. This force, to which her fine impulses of generosity, her enthusiasm, and her intellectual activity were due, gave her also a violence of character, which education and her own will had hitherto held in check. Her love now increased this natural violence. Madame de Blanzac was now, in truth, an *Addolorata.* The pity she had felt on seeing Christolphe's statue was one of those strange presentiments which pass through the human soul, a presentiment like that of Mary Magdelene, when she bathed the feet of Jesus with her tears and with perfumes, in preparation for his burial.

It was not only for the world that Christiane wore a smiling mask, it was still more for Jacques. Out of pride, she concealed her jealousy from him and, out of delicacy, she was mute about her suffering. In his presence, she was brilliant and gay, just as though she had no cares and no regrets, as though she were fully satisfied with the place she occupied in his life. She gave him all the happiness he expected from her. It was her glory to make him more happy than any other woman had done. She succeeded in this, but she alone knew at what cost.

In spite of all this, the Marquis felt, at times, an intensity of passion in her that made him vaguely uneasy. He recognised signs of frenzy in a woman, as he did in a horse. He thought he saw these signs in Christiane and he was alarmed. He consoled himself with the thought that her lofty nature and her extreme good sense were a safeguard for them both.

He had forgotten the red, plebeian blood that flowed through the Duchess's veins, and he little thought, unfortunately, how strong instinct still was within her.

CHAPTER XV

THE *liaison* of the Marquis d'Anguilhon and the Duchess de Blanzac had lasted two years, and Annie had neither heard of it nor yet guessed the truth. She had been brought up among straightforward people and was, herself, too straightforward to imagine it possible that she could be deceived within the second year of her married life, and betrayed by a woman whom she looked upon, after Madame de Keradieu, as her best friend. The very odiousness of this treachery, under the circumstances, would alone have served to prevent her suspecting it. Thanks to her temperament, Annie knew nothing of passion. She was merely a loving wife; she was not a passionately loving woman. She had not within herself the key to certain things, and Jacques had taken care not to give it her. When she was with her husband and the Duchess, she chattered gaily, without seeing the appeal in their eyes and without hearing the vibrations in their voices. She did not feel that electricity which emanates from love, and is, perhaps, love itself, the electricity which affects everyone who possesses any impressionability.

She was not surprised that Jacques should enjoy Madame de Blanzac's society, as she herself always found fresh charm in it. She rather envied the power Christiane had to interest and amuse him, but this did not amount to jealousy.

For some months past, Annie had noticed a change in the Duchess's manner to her. Christiane had fits of coldness and a strange abruptness which frequently surprised and hurt her and, as she was very susceptible, like most Americans, Madame de Blanzac had often been obliged to exert all her charms to win her pardon. If Annie had been accustomed to reflecting, her impressions would have developed and would have awakened her suspicions. Her physical activity, though, prevented her from ruminating and her disposition, like that of a very healthy child, was more given to driving away unpleasant things than to going in search of them.

Nothing, therefore, had occurred so far to disturb Annie's tranquillity. She had happiness enough, apparently, to have contented ten women and yet, in the depths of her heart, there was a sort of latent disappointment. Two years in succession, she had been obliged to give up her visit to America, the first time on account of her child and then because of the serious illness of her mother-in-law. If it had not been for the Duchess, Jacques would, undoubtedly, have found time and the opportunity to accompany his wife to New York. He had not done so, and had arranged matters in such a way that he could not have beeu blamed for unwillingness. Mrs. Villars and Clara were getting more and more impatient at the delay, and it was to this cause that the Marchioness attributed the annoyance she felt. She frequently recalled Clara's words to her: "When you are married to a Frenchman," her cousin had said, "you will find that you are years away from America."

Fearing that his wife should treat him as an American, Jacques had established his independence from

the very beginning of their married life. Annie was too proud to question him as to how he spent his time. She knew nothing except what he chose to tell her, and this spared the Marquis a great deal of untruth and prevarication.

His *liaison* did not make any visible difference in his behaviour towards his wife. He was most attentive to her, and his courtesy always charmed her. Every day, before dressing for dinner, he spent an hour with her and their child. He played with little Philippe and covered his fair curls and sweet little face with such passionate kisses, that the mother's heart was envious. He talked to Annie about their plans and mutual interests. He always mingled a few affectionate words with what he said on these commonplace subjects and, when his conscience was more than usually burdened, he was more lavish with his caresses. As soon as he left her, his wife became fully aware that he had not really told her anything. She was tempted, sometimes, to follow him and to reproach him with this, but when she began to think things over she did not see what complaint she could make. She felt injured nevertheless.

The social world in which she now mixed had not treated her, on the whole, as she had expected. Blonay had taken its place again among the great châteaux of France. Its hospitality was almost royal and people considered it an honour to be invited and were always pleased to return there. During the season, in Paris, the young Marchioness was constantly invited to balls, dinners, and receptions of all kinds. She was received everywhere most kindly, and people seemed to like her more and more. She was very generally approved and people consid-

ered that she did credit to the name and rank she bore. In spite of this, though, she had not been admitted into any special set. She was invited to give money to various charitable works, but she was only admitted as an honorary member and not asked to become a member of the Managing Committees. She met with this exclusiveness on every side, an exclusiveness which is, as it were, occult, and which the Faubourg St.-Germain knows how to wield in a way that keeps people at a distance better than words or deeds.

The French aristocracy, whatever may be said to the contrary, is still an extremely rigid caste. It is morally closed to foreigners, even when they have entered it by marriage. They are distrusted and conversation is carried on in corners when they are present. It is practically closed, too, to writers and artists, under the pretext that their manners are not always everything that could be desired, but, in reality because another La Bruyère, or Beaumarchais would not be welcome. The *grande dame* of the nineteenth century will be missing in the human gallery, thanks to a lack of documents. The Faubourg St.-Germain has tired out the inquisitiveness of every one, even that of journalists. The domestics are incorruptible, as they are part of the family. Only God and the devil know the virtue and vice behind its closed gates. It is quite certain that a very virtuous and very devout set of people exists among this aristocracy, a set of people extremely behind the times. There also exists a very cynical, corrupt, and extremely modern set. These two sets see, and visit, each other, constantly.

Thanks to the spirit of caste, and thanks to traditions common to them both and to good education, a

certain cohesion is maintained between them. Annie was naturally puzzled amid such complex surroundings. She did not understand the great devotion of the Mothers of the Church and she was amazed at the proceedings of some of the society women. She had great difficulty, therefore, in finding her level. Nothing would have persuaded her to help forward a Franco-American marriage. Influenced by unconscious resentment, she had even endeavoured to warn some of her countrywomen about certain interested designs. They had answered her: "We know all about it. We are not going to marry, but we let these people hope. They invite us, introduce us, and make a great deal of us and it is great fun." Annie had been disgusted at this way of acting and had now taken refuge in strict neutrality.

The American woman generally knows how to dispense hospitality and the young Marchioness made her home very pleasant for her husband and his friends. There was a kind of informality, which is always appreciated by bachelors, old and young. In a very short time, Annie had formed a little circle of intimate friends, composed of a few agreeable men and charming women. Every week, like Madame de Keradieu, she invited a chosen few of their friends to dinner. These little dinners and the time spent at Blonay consoled her for many other disappointments.

Blonay was a source of real satisfaction to her. She felt herself *some one* there. Her mother-in-law and the priest, with an intelligent comprehension of American character, left her all the initiative. Under her generous impulsion, many transformations had taken place. The schools were now enlarged and modernised. The agricultural orphanage, little Philippe's

gift, was nearly ready and in the little town and the surrounding villages, clean, white houses, with bright window-panes, and flowers, were to be seen. The Mayor was extremely republican in his ideas and an anti-clericalist, and Annie had asked him to help her in her improvement scheme, in order that he should not hinder her. She had acted rather against Jacques' wishes in this matter, but the result was satisfactory. The Mayor had been flattered and had done all in his power to further her plans. Annie had learned, too, how to talk to the peasants and to the poor, so that they no longer called her "the American lady," but "our lady," and this gave her very real pleasure. The good she was doing at Blonay, and her ever-increasing popularity, made the place dearer to her, so that she was always sorry to leave it.

There was something in the very air of Paris which irritated her. It was as though she had been affected there, more than anywhere else, by those sentiments around her which threatened her happiness.

CHAPTER XVI

In the solemn town house of the Anguilhons, to which her destiny had led her, Annie had arranged a nook for herself, in accordance with her own taste and education. This nook, which was her favourite retreat, and in which she received her intimate friends, was a drawing-room at the end of the suite of reception-rooms. It opened into the garden and into a conservatory. She had any number of pretty knick-knacks here, her piano, the newspapers and reviews of her country, beautiful flowers, and pictures by American artists only: Walter Gay, Harrison, Sargent, and Stoddert. She had transformed the conservatory into a charming drawing-room with tall plants to hide the walls. It was furnished with sofas, Louis XVI armchairs of gilded cane, and half a dozen of the famous rocking-chairs from New York, finished with pretty cushions tied on with ribbon. One of these chairs was the exclusive property of the Viscount de Nozay. The two rooms were quite near to the billiard- and smoking-rooms. One Thursday evening, after an informal dinner, Annie and her guests were sitting here chatting, before beginning to play poker.

The Prince de Nolles, happening to see Guy de Maupassant's *Notre Cœur* lying on a table, took it up and began to look at it.

"Do you like French novels, Madame d'Anguilhon?" he asked.

"Candidly no," answered Annie. "I read them for the sake of being *au courant* and also for the sake of the language. Half the time, though, I neither understand the people nor the sentiments. Then, too, it irritates me to see people always wanting the impossible and contriving to make themselves unhappy. You all seem to me like the child who cried for the moon —or the sun, I forget which."

"The moon, the moon," said Guy de Nozay, laughing.

"Well, we Americans only want things that are to be found in this world."

"Yes, but the rarest, the most beautiful, and the most costly," put in Monsieur de Keradieu. "You want, for instance, a faithful husband, children who grow up without any trouble, an absolutely comfortable home, finery, jewelry, amusement, travelling—and all the rest of it."

"Yes, but then, we are satisfied with that, and even with much less than all that, I assure you. Frenchwomen who live in the same place always, are bound down by habit and all kinds of things. They only travel up in the clouds and they dream of the newest and most extraordinary kind of love and sigh for heaven itself. If they would just do as we do, pack their trunks and travel round a little on earth, they would be quite astonished to find it so beautiful and so interesting and they would be quite satisfied with it. Why, life is not half long enough to see a quarter of the fine things our planet contains."

Every one laughed at this tirade.

"What a little materialist you are!" exclaimed Monsieur de Keradieu.

"A regular lover of the earth," said the Viscount de Nozay. "I am sure that America, which has already

taught us so many things, will teach us the art of being happy here below."

"I should not be in the least astonished," put in Jacques. As he was standing by the chimney-piece, near Annie, he laid his hand on her head.

"There is much more wisdom than one would imagine in these American brains," he said, jokingly.

At the sight of this little familiarity, the Duchess drew herself up involuntarily and clenched the arms of her chair, in order to restrain herself. Fortunately she was sitting a little back and the lampshade threw a shadow over her face, so that no one saw her movement, nor yet the evil expression that came into her eyes.

"We really do not feel those extraordinary sentiments described at such length in your books," continued Annie. "I have often wondered whether they are really felt, or whether they are simply invented, by way of producing a little effect in your literature. At any rate, I fancy you are much more complex than we are."

"We are old, alas," said the Prince de Nolles, "so old, indeed, that many things seem to us to have already been seen and felt. It is on this impression that those people base their theory who believe that we have lived several times in this world. In reality, it is not we who have lived here, but those whom we are continuing. You Americans are still young."

"Young!" exclaimed Madame de Keradieu, "I do not know why people always say that. We, too, were existing, either in Holland, Scotland, England, France, or Spain."

"Yes, but then you were transplanted on virgin soil," answered the Prince. "Liberty, effort, and struggles

have confused or obliterated all traces of the old races. You are essentially a new race and one that is still in the period of activity."

"And what activity!" said Monsieur de Keradieu. "When I return to Europe, after a few months in the United States, it always seems to me as though everything were petrified. If immigration were not constantly renewing the blood and the forces of the great American body, it would simply be burnt out and perish by the very feverishness of its ambition. The field of labour is strewn with worn-out, exhausted men. Their offspring lack sap, even in the second generation. The strain which women endure, in order to vie with each other in their amusements, has already begun to take effect. Society women care less and less for works of art and for the memories of the Old World. They come to Europe now in search of fresh pleasure, and they complain of everything and think there is nothing good or beautiful outside their own country. As soon as they are once back in America, though, they find some fresh pretext for leaving their husbands and their homes once more and starting again. Am I not right, Antoinette?"

"Alas, yes," answered Madame de Keradieu.

"And I maintain, too, that if Europe were not such an excellent safety-valve, there would be more unhappy husbands than there are in the United States. There are a fair number of them at present. For some little time, every man has seemed to be coveting his neighbour's wife."

"Oh, you are abominable," said Annie, "a nice idea you will give Jacques of America. Fortunately he will soon be able to judge for himself."

"When are you taking him off?"

"On the first of July, if Heaven will only help me. Our visit to America has been put off so many times, that I scarcely dare believe we shall go even now. I cannot see anything to prevent it though, now. We shall not come back before October. I want my husband to see America in its best season and that is, certainly, the autumn."

Madame de Blanzac's face turned livid on hearing these words. She tried to catch Jacques' eye, but he, manlike, was looking another way.

"I am convinced that America will interest you," said Monsieur de Keradieu to him. "You will see a real republic, states organised on the famous principle of 'one for all.' You will see a free country, where the Arab can spread his 'prayer-carpet' and the Catholic build his cathedral without any interference, and where private initiative is given free scope. It is really worth the journey to see all that. Our European liberty will seem meagre to you afterwards. It will be like the Bartholdi statue, which looks gigantic in Paris, whilst in the bay of New York it appears to be of almost paltry dimensions."

"By the way," said the Count de Ressac, "I must tell you that Monsieur and Madame de Rennes are marrying again."

"Who is Madame de Rennes?" asked Annie.

"A charming woman, whose husband, after a season at Biarritz three years ago, went off with a certain Mrs. Nelson, one of your countrywomen. He came to Paris to try to obtain a divorce. His family and friends intervened and gave him to understand that his wife was inclined to forgive him. His uncle went to see Mrs. Nelson and preached duty to her. She consented to give up her lover. An interview was

arranged between the husband and wife. They fell into each other's arms and the conclusion is that they are to go to Italy on their second honeymoon."

"Well, that is a thing, now, that no American woman would agree to or would ever be able to understand," said Annie.

"Madame de Rennes was very much in love with her husband. It is more easy to forgive any one we love."

"Is it possible to love without esteem and without perfect trust?"

"Alas, yes," said the Viscount de Nozay, with a very droll expression. "It is that which constitutes the strength and the weakness of love."

"The strength and the weakness of love," repeated Annie, knitting her eyebrows, in her effort to think. "It is too subtle for me."

"Do you not admit," put in Monsieur de Nolles, "that, in a city like Paris, men of leisure are exposed to more temptations and to greater ones than elsewhere?"

"Yes, but honour would not be honour if it cost nothing."

"You are rather severe, Madame, but logical," replied the Prince.

"There would be a fair number of homes broken up and disunited families, if French women could not forgive," said Monsieur de Ressac.

"Well, I think French women are wrong in that," said Annie, in a decided tone. "They simply encourage unfaithfulness. With us, the men know that if they are unfaithful to their wife, there is no pity nor indulgence for them, either from her or from the

world at large. They think twice before sacrificing their tranquillity and their position."

"Oh, there is no doubt about it," said Monsieur de Keradieu, laughing. "American women are very clever. They know how to educate their husbands."

"Yes, and they do not have much difficulty about it either," said Annie, seriously. "We have a title of nobility, of moral nobility, which cannot be inherited and can only be obtained by merit. It is the title of *gentleman* or *lady,* and it is only given to those who respect themselves and others. We should no longer consider the man a gentleman who had been unfaithful to his wife, and the fear of this disgrace acts as a powerful check. Those two words, *gentleman* and *lady,* have done more towards civilising and moralising our country than all the religions and all the codes."

"What you say is perfectly true," said Monsieur de Keradieu. "It is a pity that we have no equivalent for *gentleman* and *lady.* Our words *gentilhomme* and *grande dame* merely designate titled people."

"Well, you should get into the habit of extending them to the people who have nobility of character and sentiment, for that is the real nobility, after all," added Annie, boldly. "That would help your evolution. Why, even among the animals, especially dogs and horses, there are some that look, and really are, gentlemen. The little Jersey cows, so clean and delicately formed, always seem to me like little ladies."

Every one laughed at this sally and at the seriousness with which she spoke.

"Oh, Annie, Annie, how American you are!" said Jacques.

"And I am proud of it."

"You are quite right," said the Prince de Nolles, gravely.

"By the way, Ressac, you did not tell us what has become of Mrs. Nelson?" asked Monsieur de Keradieu.

"For the time being, she is in a convent at St. Jean de Luz."

"She is a Catholic, then?"

"Apparently. Her husband has married again and has kept the two children with him. One cannot help wondering what Rennes really ought to have done. Ought he to have married Mrs. Nelson, whom his desertion now leaves without protection, or ought he to return to his wife, who has her family, her children, and a position in the world?"

"He ought to return to his wife, undoubtedly," said Monsieur de Keradieu. "Individuals do not count when it is a question of principle. Mrs. Nelson put herself beyond the pale of the law. She is the one who ought to be sacrificed."

"And I do not pity her at all," said Annie. "The only thing I regret is that her accomplice should get off so easily."

The young Marchioness had, as yet, no suspicion of the truth, but for the last few months, whenever she had heard of any husband's unfaithfulness, she had felt a sort of suffering and irritation, as though she herself were affected by it. On this particular evening, it was as though some one had taken up the cudgels for Annie, in order to punish those who were deceiving her. The conversation had tortured Jacques and had pierced Christiane's heart with cruel shafts. Her pride had been ruthlessly trampled on. Guy de Nozay, guessing what the Duchess must be undergoing, had not dared to look at her. In order to put an end

to the conversation, he suggested that they should begin playing poker. When they were all taking their places at the card-table, Madame de Blanzac said to Annie, in a voice as changed as was her face:

"I am afraid I shall be obliged to leave you, for I have such a terrible headache."

"Really?" said her hostess, anxiously. "Why, yes, you are quite pale. I ought to have noticed instead of chattering so much. Please forgive me. What can I give you for it?"

"Nothing, thanks. I only need rest. I shall be right again to-morrow."

"I hope so, indeed. Jacques will take you home."

This was exactly what Christiane had wanted. She could not have restrained the anger and grief much longer which the announcement of this visit to America had aroused within her. The Marquis and she left the house together.

"I want to walk a little," she said, as soon as they were out in the street.

It was half past ten and the Rue de Varenne was absolutely deserted. Jacques took Christiane's arm and pressed it against him.

"My darling," he murmured, gently.

The tenderness in his voice was lost on Madame de Blanzac. She was too much irritated to be appeased by that, at the present moment.

"And so you are going to America on the first of July, and it is simply by chance that I hear of it," she said, in a hard voice.

"I had heard nothing about it myself, yesterday," he answered. "This morning, Annie received a letter from her lawyer, who wishes to consult us about some

investments and sales of land. I told her we might be able to start on the first of July and she is striking the iron while it is hot. This visit has been on my mind for a long time. It is as painful to me as it is to you."

"Are you sure it is?" asked Christiane, with suppressed feeling.

"Sure? As sure as I am that I love you," answered Jacques, passionately. "You do not doubt that and you cannot doubt it. Thanks to a happy combination of circumstances, I have been able to postpone this visit which I promised to Mrs. Villars. I cannot put it off, though, indefinitely. It would be put down to deliberate intention on my part, and suspicion would be aroused as to what was keeping me in Paris. I must make the sacrifice, I feel that. You ought to give me courage for it, Christiane, for you are not like an ordinary woman."

"Poor women, who are not like the ordinary ones," said the Duchess, with a forced laugh. "What heavy burdens God and men put on their shoulders! I do not think the moral force exists which can conquer jealousy, and jealousy is to love what death is to life. The more highly organised we are, the more subtle and painful is this feeling. This evening, for instance, when you laid your hand on Annie's head, I nearly cried out——"

The Marquis stopped short and looked at the Duchess. Under the drawn hood of her cloak, he saw her pale face with features drawn by passion, her sombre, shining eyes, her quivering nostrils, and trembling lips. This expression, which he had never before seen, startled and alarmed him.

"Oh, Christiane," he said, "is it really *you* saying

that? What I give to Annie is very little in comparison with what I give to you."

"Very little? The love of a husband? You should leave novelists to say that. Do you call it very little, that sentiment which makes of two creatures one? Why, the family and the whole of society is based on it. What nonsense! Annie will always remain with you; it is her right. As for me, I am destined to disappear, like that poor Mrs. Nelson. You heard what Monsieur de Keradieu said: 'Individuals do not count when it is a question of principle.' And he is quite right, too. It must be like that. Laws will not be changed for me. And then, too, you cannot deny that Annie is very dear to you."

"No, I will not deny it," replied the Marquis, bravely. "I should have grown to hate any woman, who, because she had brought me money, proved to be tyrannical or exacting. You know yourself, though, how considerate and tactful Annie has always been. You have frequently praised her to me. She is satisfied with everything, respects my liberty, and thinks of nothing but making me happy. I should have to be absolutely incapable of good feeling of any kind if I did not care for her. This affection is of a totally different essence from my love for you."

"What should you say if I were to go away with an agreeable young husband and remain absent for three or four months?"

"The probability is that I should not be able to bear it," said Jacques, with a tender look. "I should most likely follow you, at any cost. A man is always less married, though, than a woman. He belongs to himself much more— Oh, my darling," added Jacques, in the midst of his sentence, "try to forget certain

things and to be above all petty jealousy. Your nobility of character will make that possible for you, even if it should not be easy."

"You are quite mistaken; I have neither any heroism, nor yet any nobility of character," replied Madame de Blanzac, sadly. "I knew that love outside our social conventions must be painful, but I had never imagined anything as cruel——"

Jacques pressed the arm lying on his arm.

"And what about our happiness? Had you imagined that as great?" he asked, in a voice that brought back to Christiane's mind the memory of the bliss they had experienced.

"No," she answered, quietly.

"Well, everything has to be bought and paid for. If you and I had been married for the last two years, I should neither *see* you nor *feel* you as I do now."

"Because I should be a part of yourself."

"Yes, you would be my wife, but you would no longer be *the woman,* the eternal woman that man adores, the woman who is in his dreams quite as much as in his life, who makes him feel his power and his weakness. You would no longer be that, and it would be a pity."

"And you intend staying in America until the end of October?" asked Christiane, the torturing thought of Jacques' absence taking possession of her again.

"No, I shall contrive to have some business which will necessitate my returning in September and I shall leave Annie with her mother, who will then bring her back to Europe. Did you imagine that I could live four months away from you? Then, too, between now and the end of June, so many things may happen. You know how dearly I love you, how close and how

deep our union is. That, Christiane, ought to make your mind inaccessible to certain fears. Our love is as dear to me as it is to you and I shall do nothing that would be an insult to it."

Christiane breathed more freely.

"You have taken a load off my mind," she said.

"Why did you hide from me all these ideas that have been troubling you?" asked the Marquis, in a reproachful tone.

"Out of pride and delicacy. I honestly thought that I was above all this. Ah, I have had an opportunity of judging for myself how much I was above it. Take my word for it, love is not the noblest sentiment of our nature; there is too much instinct mixed with it, too much animality. It is only really great in our dreams of it."

As he said this, they had just reached the door of her house.

"I must go in now," she said, stopping and trying to free her arm, which Jacques still held.

"Tell me that you are satisfied and happy—and cured," he said.

"For the present moment, yes, quite."

In her long cloak, with the hood drawn up, there was something both alluring and mysterious about the Duchess. The Marquis gazed in admiration at her face, which was now serene once more and spiritualised, as it were. Under the half-open mantle, he saw the beautiful outlines of her figure, in its closely fitting dress of soft, gleaming satin.

"I should like to carry you off," he said, in a tone that had suddenly changed.

"Then I must ring for help," said Madame de Blanzac, putting her finger on the bell-knob.

When the gate opened, she would not allow the Marquis to go any further with her, but she left him with a feeling of triumphant joy in her heart, knowing that she had won him back.

She had scarcely disappeared when the expression on the Marquis's face changed completely. He did not go home immediately, but began to walk slowly up and down, with his head lowered and his eyes fixed on the ground, thinking over what had just taken place. As he recalled the Duchess's words, his anxiety increased. She was jealous of Annie. He had managed to appease her for to-day, but would he be able to do so to-morrow and—always? Would not this jealousy lead to a clash between the two women, as they met nearly every day? Christiane must really have been carried away by her feelings to have been conscious of her weakness, and to have owned to it. At the bare thought of all this, Jacques shuddered. He did not dare even think of the consequences of the discovery of his *liaison*. He tried to fancy that such a thing was impossible. He could not recover his equanimity though, and he said to himself that he would have to be on his guard.

"They are all the same," he said to himself, with a feeling of anger and disappointment.

When he reappeared among his guests, poker was at its height.

"I thought you were lost, Jacques," said Annie, gaily.

"I insisted on Madame de Blanzac having a little fresh air before she went in. It is such a lovely night and so I persuaded her to take a little stroll. Just at this hour, the Faubourg looks most curious. It is like a dream-city, with its long, deserted streets, all

white in the moonlight, its silent houses, and the rats going in and out of the drains. It is most fantastic."

For this little description, the Marquis must have been making use of impressions already stored in his mind, for he had certainly only seen the Duchess on this particular evening.

Guy looked up and his eye-glass fell from its orbit. A sly smile made his moustache bristle as he glanced at his friend with a mixture of anger and admiration. This picture, sketched with such careless ease, and particularly the realistic touch of the rats going in and out of the drains, seemed to him the climax of rascality and cleverness.

"Oh, those rats, those rats!" he repeated in a comic way, but in a tone that proved to the Marquis that he, at any rate, was not duped.

CHAPTER XVII

THERE was a dance at the Anguilhons'. The young Marchioness had sent out invitations to a simple cotillon, but it was a cotillon for which greenhouses, gardens, and even woods had had to contribute, for there were wreaths, chains, rings, bunches, and sheaves of spring flowers. All kinds of flowers were there, from the rose to the simple violet. The cost of it all must have been a small fortune.

The Viscount de Nozay and Annie, who had been dancing together, were just resting a few moments.

"They *are* enjoying themselves!" said Guy, glancing around him.

"Thank Heaven! I never breathe freely until I see a little animation among my guests, until I begin to *feel* the success, as you say in French."

"Well, you can breathe freely now. The animation has begun and it would be difficult to stop it. Challans has the knack of giving the start. How pretty it is with the flowers on all the women's shoulders, hands, and arms! The flowers themselves look as though they are living and animated by the music. I am sure the idea of this cotillon is one of yours."

"Yes, but Madame d'Anguilhon, the Duchess, and Jacques helped me to organise everything. It has been such fun. Just look at Madame de Blanzac! How beautiful she is! I would give anything to be like her."

"And she would, no doubt, give a great deal to have your youth. Without flattery, I do not think you need envy any one. One should neither overestimate nor undervalue one's own worth."

"I once had a fairly good opinion of myself," said Annie, laughing. "I used to be so much admired and spoilt, but since I have been in Europe I have come down a little in my own estimation. I quite realise that French women have a peculiar charm that I shall never have, a charm that is due to race, education, or to some other cause. I feel a regular baby beside them and I am always afraid that Jacques will, in the long run, think I am insipid. I am only surprised that he should ever have given me a thought."

Surprised that Jacques should have given a thought to her, when she had a dowry of sixty million francs! Guy looked at the young Marchioness, with an expression of mingled pity and admiration.

"She must have been created specially, money and all, for that rascal, Jacques!" he said to himself, half angrily.

On the other side of a great mass of plants, to the right of Annie, two men were chatting idly about the various people they were watching.

"Just look at Anguilhon and Madame de Blanzac," said one of them. "What a fine couple they make! Two aristocrats there, and no mistake."

"More or less. The Duchess's father was the son of a peasant."

"Really? Well, with women one never knows. At any rate, on the Arançay side of her family there was aristocracy enough to make up for that. I have often wondered why Anguilhon and Madame de Blanzac did not marry."

"A question of money, probably."

"Well, it was a pity. They look as though they were made for each other. They always give me the impression that they either have been in love with each other, or that they will be, some day. They appear to be on the best of terms, at any rate. The Marchioness must be of a very unsuspicious nature and she is certainly very imprudent."

Annie overheard the whole of this conversation. Just at first, nothing troubled her, except the words "made for each other." She looked at her husband and then at the Duchess. They seemed to be dancing in a strange way, at one moment with a languorous step and then, all at once, with great vivacity. As she watched them, she felt less and less joyful and her heart sank. They certainly did look as though they had been made for each other. She remembered that Clara had said the same thing. Annie did not regain her serenity all the rest of the evening. The words "made for each other" kept echoing within her and she could hear them above the sound of the music, the conversations, and all the joyful gaiety of the ball.

Later on in the evening, she happened to be with Monsieur de Keradieu, just behind her husband and the Duchess. They were both standing in a doorway and she heard Jacques say, in a warm, muffled voice:

"I can quite understand the poor King of Bavaria having Wagner's operas played for himself alone, in order to enter into them better. He was a great idealist. I should like to dance with you, to the sound of an invisible orchestra, in an empty room decorated with fragrant flowers, lighted with very soft lights. I should like to dance with you then as long as I had any strength to dance . . ."

Although Annie was half hidden by the curtain, Christiane had seen her, fortunately. She turned round and said to her, with a smile:

"You hear what nonsense Monsieur d'Anguilhon is talking?"

"I do," answered the young Marchioness, somewhat coldly.

She had heard, but she had not understood all that her husband's words meant.

Monsieur de Keradieu was simply amazed.

"Why, it is a fancy worthy of a *décadent* or a symbolist," he said, by way of putting Annie off the scent. "Do you belong to the Rose-Croix brotherhood?"

Jacques seized the helping hand offered to him.

"No," he answered, with a laugh that did not sound genuine, "but dancing always intoxicates me a little."

"You see what it is to be young," said Henri de Keradieu, in a careless tone. "Dancing simply tires me, nowadays."

Annie was never the same again after this ball. It was destined to be one of the turning-points in her life. The conversation she had overheard produced in her the same effect as that produced by a stone thrown slantingly on to the surface of still water. Thanks to the rebound, the ripples are increased in number and size. At every moment, and everywhere, the words kept coming back to her mind in the most cruel way, causing her pain and spoiling all her enjoyment. She began to wonder whether Jacques and the Duchess had not been in love with each other in the old days. She did not go as far as to suppose it possible for them to be in love now. She knew that Christiane had wanted her to marry Jacques and had even helped to bring the marriage about and this somewhat reassured

her. Her husband's words then came to her memory. Most certainly he would never have wished to dance with her, Annie, to the music of an invisible orchestra, in an empty room, with fragrant flowers all round and a soft light. She was surprised that he should have so extravagant a fancy.

Christiane's visits no longer gave her the same pleasure as formerly. Her presence, which, only a few days before, had caused her such joy, made her anxious and nervous now, so that, without being aware of it herself, she was less cordial in her greeting.

Jacques soon noticed the change in his wife. Her charming face seemed to be always clouded over now and, on looking at her suddenly, he was constantly finding her limpid eyes fixed on him with an expression of curiosity and anxiety in them. He could not imagine how, but he felt sure that her distrust had been awakened. He was more attentive to her and more tender and he began to give up more time to her. Annie, on her side, urged on by a curious instinct of rivalry and an unconscious desire to make the Duchess suffer, began to depart from her natural reserve, and to praise her husband's good qualities to her. She would speak of his little attentions to her, and talk enthusiastically of this long journey they were going together. These confidences simply tortured Christiane, and more than once she almost cried out: "Enough, enough!"

Under the empire of a sentiment she did not comprehend, the young wife was more familiar in her treatment of her husband now, in the presence of Madame de Blanzac. One day, when she was standing up near his chair, she suddenly put her hands over his eyes.

"Jacques," she said, "I will not allow you to look at Madame de Blanzac like that—or at any other woman," she added, laughing.

The duel had begun between the two rivals, and it was easy to foresee that it would be fatal for both of them.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Marquis and Marchioness d'Anguilhon had engaged their berths on board the *Gascogne,* and were to embark for America on the first of July.

The thought of this journey made the Duchess more and more desperate. By virtue of her right as his wife, Annie was taking away the man whom she, Christiane, loved, and who belonged to her. At the bare thought of this, her whole being protested and her pride rebelled. At times, the effervescence of her passionate love obscured her reason, just as the effervescence of a heady wine will hide the wine itself. She felt within herself a violence that alarmed her, and she suffered all the more intensely because she had to suffer in silence. The day when she had given way to her jealousy in Jacques' presence, he had appeared surprised and pained, but he had not understood her. A man only understands his own jealousy. He always considers that of a woman more or less unreasonable. When he is no longer suffering from jealousy himself, he very quickly forgets how painful and cruel it is to body, mind, and soul alike. The Duchess knew this, and so did not speak again about the visit to America. Jacques, on his side, from moral cowardice, had avoided making any allusion to it. This was a mistake. In situations like theirs, the mind is always at high pressure, and scenes, reproaches, and

fits of anger all act as safety-valves. Christiane had disdained this vulgar means of relief and the consequence was that her heart was nearly bursting with pain and sorrow.

It was the fifteenth of June and the heat was overwhelming. From the four points of the heavens, the clouds were rising and a storm was gathering over Paris. Madame de Blanzac had given orders that she was not at home to callers. This frequently happened now, to the great disappointment of her friends. The electricity with which the atmosphere was charged affected her, as it does the birds, the plants, and the barometer. She was suffering to the very depths of her being, physically and morally. After trying to interest herself in books and music, she began to pace up and down the room, slowly and with irregular steps. Her head was bowed, as though under the weight of painful thoughts. From time to time, she would go to the French window, to get a little air and to see in which direction the storm was.

The Keradieus and the Anguilhons were going together to the *Ambassadeurs* that evening. As Madame de Blanzac had invited the Prince de Nolles to dinner, and as he detested *cafés-concerts,* she had been obliged to decline going with them. This she regretted on Jacques' account, and she was hoping that the weather might prevent them from carrying out their plan.

Poor Christiane! She, whose mind had once soared so high, had now come down to such a paltry wish!

Just as she had looked at the sky for the tenth time, a letter was brought to her from the Prince de Nolles. He wrote to excuse himself from coming to dinner, as he was called away from Paris on important business.

It was with keen satisfaction that the Duchess read these lines, destined though they were to urge her on in the direction of the abyss. She decided to go herself and tell Annie that she was free, after all, and ask Jacques to secure two more seats, one for herself and one for her uncle. She rang for her gloves and hat and went in neighbourly fashion, as she frequently did, next door. The footman told her that the Marquis and the Marchioness were out in the garden. She said she would go out to them. When she had reached the stone steps leading outdoors, she looked across the lawn and along the two paths, shaded by trees. As she saw no one there, she turned in the direction of the greenhouse, the door of which was wide open. Before reaching it, she heard childish cries of joy, and the sound of kisses. She stood still and, through a gap in the foliage, she saw Jacques and Annie sitting on a sofa, with their backs turned towards her. The child was standing up between them, holding their faces together with his little arms and kissing them in turn.

"One for papa, one for mamma," he was saying.

The arrival of the nurse put an end to the game and Annie freed herself from the child's embrace.

"Here is Mary," she said. "Go with her and be good."

The boy clambered down and ran to his nurse. This little family scene gave the Duchess a pang at her heart and brought the tears to her eyes.

Jacques' voice, his tender, warm voice that she knew so well, held her rooted to the spot.

"What a fine child he is, that son of ours!" he said. "With his white complexion and his fair hair, he looks a regular Saxon."

"I hope he will have the Anguilhon nose," returned Annie.

"And I hope he will have the energy and the practical mind of the Villars family. Our race greatly needs those qualities and no woman better than an American could give them to him."

"Yes, I think that—but you, yourself, Jacques, would have been happier with a French woman."

"You say that for the pleasure of hearing me repeat the contrary. Happier," he continued, "why, we have been married now four years and a half, and we have never had the slightest disagreement, not a single disagreeable word. Very few married people could say the same, I assure you. No, I should not like any other woman than you for my companion through life and I should not like any other woman for the mother of my sons,—of my sons," he repeated and then he added, in a lower voice, "for we shall have another soon, shall we not?"

The Marquis put his arm round Annie's shoulders and, drawing her to him, kissed her lips.

"Jacques!"

On hearing this name uttered like a cry of pain, the husband and wife rose to their feet with a start and, turning round, saw the Duchess advancing towards them. She looked like some tragic apparition with her livid face and her eyes gleaming with madness.

"Which of us are you deceiving?" she asked, addressing the Marquis. "Annie," she continued, "your husband has been my lover for two years—for two years, you understand. I have given him more than you, for I have given him my honour and my life. We have always loved each other. . . . He married you because he needed money, and he could not borrow

it except on that condition. This is the truth. I have wanted to tell you for long enough. I have done so at last— You can give him some more sons now, if you feel inclined——"

After uttering these atrocious words, Christiane turned and moved towards the door, staggering like an intoxicated person.

"Go to your room," said the Marquis to his wife, in a voice so changed that it was unrecognisable.

Annie obeyed mechanically. She went away without uttering a word, her teeth clenched together, and an expression of horror and disgust on her face.

Jacques then went quickly after the Duchess. She could not have gone far, as her heart was beating so wildly that she could not draw her breath. She had just managed to reach an armchair in the next drawing-room, and had sunk down on to it. As the Marquis approached, she made a supreme effort, and stood up again. They looked at each other for a few seconds in silence, with an expression of defiance in their eyes, and then Jacques, giving way to the anger that was surging up within him, seized the Duchess's wrist roughly, as though he would have liked to crush her there and then.

"It is *you—you* who could be guilty of such an infamous thing?" he said, his eyes flashing with rage. "It is unworthy of you!"

This violence reacted on the Duchess's nerves. A rush of blood chased the paleness from her face. She disengaged herself from the Marquis's grasp and, drawing herself up haughtily, said, with the most surprising calmness:

"Yes, it is I who have committed this infamy. Your

treachery urged me to it, and I do not regret it." She said the last words in a hard tone of voice.

Jacques shrugged his shoulders.

"My treachery?" he exclaimed. "I am married and you were fully aware of that fact."

"Yes, but one never believes—one never realises. Any woman who has seen the man she loves kissing the lips of another woman would understand. That kiss maddened me. If I had had a revolver, I should have killed you."

"That would have been better for me. What you have done is as though you had thrown vitriol in my face. I should have preferred death."

As Jacques said this, it was as though his legs had given way under him. He sank down on a chair and his pale face and haggard look suddenly roused the Duchess's pity and remorse. She approached him and laid her hand gently on his shoulder.

"Shall you ever forgive me?" she asked, humbly.

"Forgive you," he repeated, in a mechanical way. "I do not know—I feel like a man on whom a thunderbolt has just fallen."

"Well, when you can think again, say to yourself that I was carried away by the pain that your act and your words caused me. Say to yourself, too, that the end of our dream had to come to-day, and that nothing could have advanced or delayed it. It is surely a case which shows that we are led by destiny. Adieu. You will come and tell me, to-morrow, what happens between Annie and you, will you not?"

"I will come with you to the door," said Jacques, getting up.

"No, there is no need to," said Christiane, and then, seeing that the Marquis was paying no attention to

her words, she added, in an imperative tone: "Stay where you are."

Jacques obeyed her this time and she went away, passing through the long suite of reception-rooms. He watched her in a kind of stupor. He saw her push aside the curtains on the doors, gradually get smaller in the distance, until at last she disappeared altogether. A strange sensation of cold, desertion, and gloom then came over him.

Just at this moment, he heard a peal of thunder. His nerves were so much shaken that he started violently. He went to the window and looked up at the sky.

"On what slight things a man's happiness depends!" he said to himself. "Nothing of this would have happened if it had not been for this accursed thunder-storm!"

CHAPTER XIX

ANNIE never knew how she reached her room, but, when once there, she locked herself in. Dizzy and bewildered, and trembling all over, she threw herself on to a sofa and buried her face in a cushion. For a few moments, she could not realise just what had happened. Gradually, the odious scene came back to her mind in all its details. She then drew herself up abruptly and, with a fixed gaze in her eyes, her nose taking a pinched expression and her mouth becoming rigid, she began to roll the hem of her handkerchief round nervously.

And so Madame de Blanzac had been her husband's mistress for two years and she had only been married for her money! This revelation had, at first, given her the same terror that she would have had if she had suddenly seen her house swallowed up by the earth and felt the ground giving way under her feet. At present, though, this double infamy had raised within her a whole tide of anger and contempt, which threatened to sweep all before it. Jacques was not a gentleman! This seemed to her more frightful than the unfaithfulness itself. He had accepted an immense fortune from her, without loving her. He had perjured himself, had lied to her thousands of times, he, whose family motto was *Tout droit.* She had fallen into one of the traps for heiresses, of which Frank

Barnett had warned her. Ah, if this were to be known in America, how people would triumph!

Annie was surprised at herself for having believed a foreigner's word so readily. She recalled that dinner at the Duchess's, where she had met Jacques for the first time. He had seemed to her such a thorough aristocrat. He had paid no attention to her and had taken very little notice of her for a long time. And yet, he had intended marrying her and he had acted in this way merely to arouse her interest. She had been the victim of a regular plot. The various incidents which had brought them together came back to her memory. She now believed that they had all been carefully arranged. Then she recalled the beautiful things Jacques had said on that evening when he had declared his love. He had been so tender and what he said had all been so dignified. A burning blush swept over her face as she thought that he had simply been making fun of her. Well, he had certainly played his part very cleverly. The young wife's heart swelled with bitterness at the thought that the gift of herself and of an almost royal fortune had not sufficed for making her husband respect her. He had deceived her after a year and a half of married life and—under their own roof. He had continued to blind her with his protestations of love. This denunciation, which had interrupted his hypocritical kiss, was his punishment. She saw Madame de Blanzac, suddenly appearing before them and hurling those horrible words at them, which were to separate them for ever. She had looked taller than usual and very terrible, with her livid face and dilated eyes. What had prompted her to that denunciation? Was it jealousy? How could she be jealous though, when

she knew that Jacques had no love for his wife? And so she had been his mistress for the last two years and the confidence that she, Annie, had had in them both had given them free play. Not only had she had no suspicion of what was going on, but she had helped them herself, by constantly throwing them together. They certainly had deceived her and gulled her. It was not at all surprising that they had always had so much to say to each other. And they had probably been meeting each other, clandestinely, in some mysterious ground-floor flat, like the people that one reads of in the *Vie Parisienne*. And so the Duchess, *grande dame* and proud as she was, would condescend to meet her lover in a flat that he would have to furnish with his wife's money. That was certainly the climax.

"What a set! What a set!" exclaimed Annie, aloud, squeezing her hands together.

"Yes, they had evidently been made for each other," she went on soliloquising, "physically and morally."

A feeling of absolute desertion and intense loneliness then came over the young wife, bringing the tears to her eyes. What should she do? she asked herself. Should she obtain a divorce? No, for then, Jacques would be able to marry Madame de Blanzac, and she would not give him that opportunity. She would keep his title and his name. She had paid dearly enough for them to have a right to keep them. She would return to America, to her mother and her family, and spend the rest of her life among straightforward people. It would have been so much better for her if only she had never come away. At the thought of returning to America, Annie suddenly felt the strength of

the ties that bound her to Europe. Curiously enough, an instantaneous vision of New York flashed through her mind. She saw its long avenues, its tall, narrow houses, its middle-class homes, its swarming crowds, and its hurried and noisy daily life. She then saw Paris, with all its elegance and repose. She felt sure that she should be very sorry to leave it, when the time really came. And then Blonay that she loved so much, and all the philanthropic schemes that she had commenced. There was the priest, too, with whom she got on so well. She then thought of her mother-in-law, who had been such a perfect friend to her. A suspicion suddenly crossed her mind. Had her mother-in-law been a true friend, or had she, too, been playing a part? Had the meeting at La Bluette been arranged? She thought this over for a few minutes, and then her face brightened. No, Madame d'Anguilhon was certainly innocent of all these vile things and had known nothing of them. It did Annie good to think that, at least, there was one person on whom she could count. She then began to examine the situation with the most extraordinary lucidity. Since she did not intend to consent to a divorce, she would have to remain in France. Her son would be the head of the Anguilhon family, so that she could not take him away to America. If she stayed in France, she would have to continue living under the same roof as her husband. There must be no scandal, as she would have to endeavour to save the honour of the name that she bore. She would try to carry all this out. By remaining at her post, she felt sure that she would greatly disappoint the Duchess. It was some little consolation to avenge herself in this way.

Poor Annie! She would have been very indignant

if, at that moment, any one had told her she was very glad to find that her duty obliged her to stay with Jacques, that she loved him in spite of everything, and that she would love him still more as time went on.

CHAPTER XX

THE Marquis d'Anguilhon went to his room in a very unenviable frame of mind. All the consequences of his folly now rose up before him. There would be a divorce and this would mean scandal and ruin. His son's future would be darkened and the happiness of his wife and mother destroyed for ever. He was simply crushed at the thought of the immense disaster. He did not remain long, however, in this condition. He had not the force of character to avoid certain errors and follies, but when once he had committed them, he was courageous enough to try to repair them. When brought face to face with a critical situation, his innate bravery and clear-headedness came to his aid and his hereditary qualities helped him to come out of the difficulty in a creditable way. In this dire moment, they did not fail him. Instead of knocking his head against the wall, he set himself calmly to think over the situation. It was by no means reassuring. During the terrible scene that had just taken place, he had not dared to look at Annie, but he had felt her horror and contempt in a magnetic way. He knew how highly her sense of honour was developed and how rigid she was in questions of morality. He was quite prepared to be severely judged and pitilessly treated. With her character and her temperament, it would be impossible to make her relent or persuade

her to forgive him. Jacques saw clearly enough that his only chance was to make a sincere confession of his acts and of his feelings. The truth would, fortunately, make him seem somewhat less odious and might give him back a little of his prestige. An explanation was both necessary and inevitable. It was better to get it over at once.

After bracing himself up for the ordeal, he went and knocked at his wife's door. On receiving no answer, he went round by another landing and, passing through the dressing-room, entered his wife's room by the other door.

On seeing him suddenly appear before her, Annie rose, as though to protest against his presence. There were no signs of tears on her face, but very evident signs of intense grief. On seeing it so drawn and so changed, Jacques felt the keenest remorse. He was tempted to take her in his arms, to kneel before her, and beg her to forgive him. The cold, implacable look in her eyes restrained him from doing this, fortunately. He conquered his emotion and, with his head perfectly erect, said:

"I have not come to try to justify myself——"

"That would be difficult, I should think," interrupted the Marchioness.

"It would be impossible," answered Jacques, with perfect self-possession. "I merely wish to give you the true facts," he continued, "as I do not care for you to think me worse than I am. I know you will listen to me, if only out of a sense of justice."

The Marchioness was completely subdued by the boldness and audacity of her husband. She sat down again, absolutely unable to utter a word. Jacques took an armchair and, with his eyes fixed on his wife,

he told her exactly the truth about the way the marriage had been suggested to him by Bontemps, just as he was preparing to start for Africa. He told her how he had gone to the Duchess and also about the transaction with Madame de Lène. These two details were extremely disagreeable to confess.

"Before deciding," he added, "I wanted to see you. I looked at you the whole of an evening at the Opera, through my glasses. You fascinated me by the gay, frank expression of your face, by your distinguished look, the pretty way your head was set, the colour of your hair, and your beautiful complexion. I was tempted to try and win you, all the more so as I had been told that you did not wish to marry a Frenchman. You know me well enough to be sure that I would never have consented to marry a girl I did not like, even if she had possessed the fortune of all the Rothschilds. When I asked you to be my wife, I was actuated by a feeling that was deep and sincere and absolutely disinterested."

"All that is very pretty," said Annie, with an accent of contempt, "but you forget that Madame de Blanzac told me, just now, you had always loved each other."

"Yes, but it is quite possible to have within us the germs of a disease or of a passion, for a long time, without knowing it. The Duchess and I had known each other from childhood, but we had been separated by circumstances. My marriage brought us together again. The germs which had been within us developed, our love became irresistible, and we were weak and gave way to it."

"Yes, and you were false to all your oaths, to all your promises, just like the most ordinary of men. I do not really know why one should expect to find

more honour and more loyalty in the aristocracy than in other classes of society. I am reading French history now and I find that dukes, princes, and marquises have betrayed their country, their kings have treated with the enemy and been guilty of every kind of infamy."

At this slap, so roughly administered by Annie's little democratic hand, Jacques turned pale, his eyes flashed, and his lips quivered with anger. He mastered himself though, and held up his head again, as he said:

"There have been traitors and miserable wretches among us, for the simple reason that, in this world, nothing is perfect, neither race, family, nor individuals. I would advise you to continue reading and to rise above personalities. You will see that the crimes of a few have been outbalanced by the courage, heroism, and real merit of the great majority, and that the princes, dukes, and marquises have made France, that they defended it against England, Germany, and Spain, and gave it a preponderance and a prestige that it will, perhaps, never have again. My faults must not make you unjust," added the Marquis, with dignity. "Then, too," he continued, after a moment's pause, "believe me, we do not make our own destiny. You can see that by yourself. Had you not declared that you would never marry a foreigner? I married you with the firm intention of making you happy—I have not been able to do so."

"If I had been unfaithful to you and had come to you and said that it was due to fatality, how should you have received me?"

"Logically, I should have pitied and forgiven you, but I must own that, very probably, I should not have

been wise enough for that. The wife's unfaithfulness has such grave consequences. It destroys the integrity of the family, whilst that of the husband——"

"Merely destroys the happiness of a woman," interrupted Annie. "That, of course, is a very small matter."

"No, it is not a small matter, especially in the case of a woman like you. I have suffered horribly at the thought of deceiving you, and all the more as I have always loved you."

Annie's eyes opened wide in her astonishment.

"You have always loved me?" she repeated, slowly.

"Always," said the Marquis, in a firm tone. "My affection for you has gone on increasing. All my tender words and all my caresses were the expression of that deep and noble sentiment which is called conjugal love."

"Ah, really? And what about that much deeper and, probably, much nobler sentiment, which you have for Madame de Blanzac? What is that called?" asked the Marchioness, with biting irony. "I am curious to know that."

"Love," answered Jacques, imperturbably.

A pained look crossed Annie's face.

"I thought it was only in novels that a man loves two women at the same time."

"In life, too, alas! You see the wife becomes flesh of our flesh; she bears our name; she becomes a part of ourselves, and we can love outside marriage as well. This is so true that one of my friends told me that he was constantly tempted to tell his wife the worries that his mistress causes him."

"Ah, what poor little girls we Americans are!" exclaimed Annie. "How little we know to what we

are exposing ourselves by marrying men with such different souls from ours!"

"Annie, I would give my life to repair the wrong I have done you," said the Marquis in a tone of absolute sincerity.

"Words, nothing but words," replied the young wife. "You know quite well that you cannot repair it."

"I can, at any rate, give you back your liberty."

It was not without violent emotion, that Jacques uttered these words.

"You mean divorce?" said Annie, turning paler. "Thank you, you are very kind, but that would only be adding to my misfortune. It is the same with us as with you; a woman who is divorced, even when the fault is not hers, has a false position always. I have had great difficulty in accustoming myself to your kind of life. I have felt horribly lonely and homesick often. At present, I am acclimatised; I have made some friends, and I have created certain interests for myself. It would be almost like a second exile to go back to America now. Then, too, there is Philippe. I do not wish him to be the son of divorced parents and I will not give him up. I have often blamed French women for continuing to live with unfaithful husbands. I spoke then without reflection. It had not occurred to me that they could be kept at their post by their children. One does not realise the strength of certain bonds until one wants to break them," she added bitterly. "No tribunal could divorce us more effectually than the words uttered by Madame de Blanzac," she went on, with a slight change in her voice. "This house and Blonay are big enough for us to be able to live apart and without being in each other's way."

Jacques did not show the joy he felt on hearing these words.

"It shall be exactly as you wish," he said, coldly. "As you refuse divorce, I must ask you to observe the strictest silence about what has taken place. Can you promise to act in such a way that no one may suspect the truth?"

"You wish to save Madame de Blanzac's reputation?"

"I must, since she is a woman and has no one to defend her——"

"And she is also a victim of fatality?"

"Certainly. People are always to be pitied who have the cruel parts to play. Would you like to change places with her?"

"No, most decidedly not."

"Well, then, you see——"

"I shall keep silence, but not on Madame de Blanzac's account, as I do not pretend to have any greatness of soul. It will be for your mother's sake and for the sake of my family. If the way you have treated me were known in America, every one would say that I had what I deserved, and I should be despised for continuing to live with you. No one would understand, no one *could* understand such a thing. I shall try, at any rate, to save my own dignity. You can be quite easy on that score, as it is as much in my interest as in yours that this secret should be kept. There is only one thing. The rupture between Madame de Blanzac and me is sure to cause a sensation. People will try to find out the reason and they will discover the truth, you may be sure of that."

"When two men have any reason for concealing the real reason of a duel, they put people off the scent

by getting up a quarrel. You can do the same. Reasons for falling out with each other will be easy enough to find."

"You might find one yourself, as I am not good at lies."

"I will try," said Jacques, keeping calm. "Then, too, Madame de Blanzac is just going to Deauville and we are going to America."

"America?" interrupted Annie. "Do you imagine I want to go there, under present conditions? Clara would have guessed the truth before we had been in New York an hour. And I should not have strength of mind to keep it from her, either, most probably. We will go to Blonay first, and then we might travel for a time anywhere, in Sweden and Norway, perhaps, with the Keradieus. It will be our divorce-trip as a complement to our wedding-trip. It will be quite French."

The Marquis rose and went to the window. The storm had been short and the weather was quite fine again.

"Are we going to the *Ambassadeurs?*" he asked, calmly, as though nothing had happened.

Annie was taken aback by her husband's self-possession, but she quickly recovered herself.

"Oh, yes, certainly," she answered, promptly. "I am quite like a French woman now, acting a comedy, obliged to deceive, to dissemble, and to throw dust in every one's eyes. I shall play my part very badly, I warn you of that. I have never had anything to hide before. I have never had any sorrow——"

These last words went to Jacques' heart.

"I would rather have died than have caused you any," he said.

"Yes, but you are not dead, and my life is spoilt for ever."

"I will do all that is humanly possible to make the situation less painful."

"It is not in your power."

"I will try, nevertheless."

With these words, uttered in a resolute tone, the Marquis went away. His step was as firm and his head as erect, as though his conscience had nothing with which to reproach him.

Annie watched him go and in her eyes there was an expression of mingled stupefaction, anger, and involuntary admiration. Her lips then began to twitch with the little quivering which betokens tears and, in another minute, they had welled up to her eyes and were falling down her cheeks. She wiped them away, at first, with a sort of rage, but they continued to flow until they had quietly allayed the first paroxysm of her sorrow.

CHAPTER XXI

Even those who believe the most firmly in free-will cannot deny that anger, love, or jealousy may annihilate what we call reason and will, and make a man commit acts that will be fatal to him, acts which will influence not only his own destiny, but that of others.

Jacques' kiss had been a shock to the Duchess's heart and brain alike. She had uttered a cry, urged on by an irresistible impulse, thus denouncing herself. As soon as she came to herself again, her wonder was that she could have acted as she had done. For some hours afterwards, her limbs were still trembling nervously as a result of her fit of madness. All the dire consequences of her rashness presented themselves to her mind, until she was absolutely terror-stricken. Annie would probably apply for a divorce, and the thought of a divorce brought her no joy. She knew men well enough to be fully aware that even the woman they love the best only occupies a secondary place in their existence. The Marquis d'Anguilhon revelled in great luxury, the power that a large fortune gave him, social position, and prestige. He would never forgive her for the odium she had brought upon him, for the scandal in which his name would be involved, and for the breaking up of his home. She recalled the words she had heard him say to his wife and she realised, more than ever, that his love-affair with her was only

an incident in his life. She felt that Annie was more powerful than she was. The scene she had just witnessed came to her mind again. She saw little Philippe, who was like a living link, drawing together the faces of his mother and father. She felt very insignificant in comparison with this great human trinity and her heart began to bleed again with jealousy. Then she began to think of her uncle's grief, of the pain and surprise of her friends. She thought of the Keradieus and then of Louis de Challans and, as though she felt their contempt, a violent colour immediately suffused her cheeks. She could brave the world and public opinion, but when she thought of her friends, all her courage left her. The idea of suicide consoled her. She would find a way to escape from all these horrors. Death, at any rate, was within reach of her hand and not beyond her courage. She now tried to imagine the interview between Jacques and his wife. Just as she was saying to herself that she should never have the strength of mind to wait until the next day, in order to hear the result of it, a letter was brought to her from the Marquis. She tore the envelope open and, with her heart beating wildly, read the words:

"Everything going as well as possible, much better than we might have expected. Farewell till to-morrow."

The Duchess's heart was greatly relieved. She read the words over several times. There was evidently to be no divorce then and no scandal. How had Jacques managed to pacify his wife? Annie, of all women, was so unbending and so rigid in her opinions. She had so frequently railed against women who forgive things of this kind. She began to wonder whether they were reconciled. Curiously enough, she then won-

dered whether they would go to the *Ambassadeurs*. This idea took possession of her tired brain and, dominating all her other thoughts, pursued and worried her. Finally, Christiane began to feel that pain caused by a fixed idea. She was afraid of not being able to go to sleep. She felt that she must have complete oblivion, non-existence, for a time, at any cost. It occurred to her that Dr. Moreau might help her, and she sent asking him to come at once. As soon as he saw Madame de Blanzac, the doctor guessed that the catastrophe he had foreseen had taken place.

"I want you to give me twelve hours of sleep," she said to him.

"As much as that?"

"Years of sleep, if you could."

Monsieur Moreau took the Duchess's hand in his. The quivering nerves and the uneven pulse revealed to him the violence of the shock she had just had. His eyes expressed a tender pity and sympathy which went straight to Madame de Blanzac's heart and made her give way suddenly. Two big tears rolled down her cheeks.

"That 's right," said the doctor, in a voice that showed how deeply he was moved. "Do not try to stop your tears. Nothing could give you greater relief. Discretion forbids my questioning you, but if you need a friend, on whom you can count——"

"Yes, I do indeed. I need a friend like you, one who understands the human being, body and soul. You have been sent to me by Providence to help me in the crisis through which I am passing. It was for that, perhaps, that you were brought into the circle of my existence."

"There is no doubt about that and I consider myself

fortunate to have been chosen. I guessed everything, some time ago. When I saw you entering upon the dangerous and sorrowful path of passionate love, I drew nearer to you, instinctively, so that I might be able to help you."

"Well, then, the time has come," said the Duchess, sadly. "It would be difficult for you to save me, though."

"The difficulty does not matter, so that I can save you. Tell me how matters stand. You need have no fear, as you know I can understand it all."

Christiane was influenced magnetically by the kindness and the moral force of this essentially superior man, and she made her confession with a rare sincerity. And the doctor, studying this woman's soul thus laid bare before him, followed, with keen curiosity, the developments of the passion which had ravaged it. He noted, with astonishment and admiration, the various sentiments this passion had engendered. When Madame de Blanzac told him of her mad action, he turned pale with emotion.

"You really said that?" he said, trying to imagine the frightful scene.

"Yes, I did, and to think that there are people who will not admit that there are crimes for which passion alone is responsible!"

"People who have not studied the human machine, though. Those who have studied it are only surprised that these accidents do not happen more often. When they do happen, they are willed by God, for some reason which we do not know. You are one of the women not created for man, but to command, and to accomplish some great work."

"I think you are mistaken there, for I should have

been perfectly happy with a husband of my choice and children."

"No, the happiness of married life would not have sufficed for you very long. You have too pronounced an individuality for that. The terrible awakening you have just had will enlighten you as to your true vocation. We will talk of that later on, though. For the present, we must only think of averting the scandal which threatens you."

The Duchess showed the doctor Jacques' letter. His face lighted up on reading it.

"We are saved," he said, in a tone that was almost joyful. "The young Marchioness evidently understands that she will lose more than she would gain, by making a scandal of it. I would rather know that your secret is in her hands than in the hands of another woman. She will keep silence out of pride, and she is one of the women who can keep silence."

The doctor saw the expression of intense pain that came into Christiane's eyes.

"Try not to think of the future," he said. "What is the use of thinking about it, as we can form no accurate idea as to what it will be. When we are young and healthy, the idea of sickness, old age, and death seems terrible. When these things come to us, we scarcely feel them, because we are in the state of mind and body required. If any one had told you what was to happen to-day, you would have thought that you could not survive it. You may be very sure that you had been prepared for it a long time beforehand. When you are yourself again, you will be surprised that you did not suffer more. What you need now is rest. I wish I could just lay my hands on you and give you peace, but I am not Christ, alas! All I can

do is to calm your mind. I shall send you two *cachets,* which you must take in an hour's time. I shall come back, later in the evening, to see whether they have produced the effect I hope."

"I have a better idea than that. I sent for you, and I am supposed to have a very bad headache indeed. Come and have dinner with uncle, and then, before leaving, you can see me again."

"Agreed."

With this word, the doctor rose to go. On taking the Duchess's hand, he raised it to his lips, in token of respect. This was a thing he had never done since he had known her.

CHAPTER XXII

JACQUES left his wife's room with the feeling that he had just won a victory. The certainty that there would be no scandal gave him such relief that he felt almost happy. As soon as he was tranquil in his mind, the love which he had thought dead awakened again within him, in all its force. All the delightful recollections of Christiane the last two years came back to his mind, one by one.

"Fancy spoiling all that!" he said to himself and he shuddered as he thought of the extraordinary scene which had taken place. The Duchess's violence, which had broken all bounds, dishonoured two persons, and wrecked two lives, had the same effect on him, with his ultra refinement, as drunkenness would have had. He felt a mixture of horror and repulsion at the thought of such violence. His heart then softened with tenderness and pity, as he thought of what Christiane must have suffered. He wondered, with anguish, how she would endure the situation in which she had placed herself. He would be forced to side with his wife in the pretended quarrel and to break off his friendship, ostensibly, with the Duchess. Their mutual friends would be sure to try to act as mediators and the secret would then most certainly leak out. His common-sense told him that an affair of this kind could not be hushed up as easily as had seemed possible at first.

It was just a moment's respite that had been granted to them before the final catastrophe. He wondered what would be the nature of this catastrophe and who would be the victim.

"God grant that I may be the only one!" he said to himself in all sincerity.

The next day, Jacques went to La Rosette, his heart heavy with dread. Christiane did not come forward to meet him, as usual. He found her in the drawing-room, sitting near a window. The dark rings under her eyes and her drawn features accentuated her resemblance to the *Addolorata* to such a degree that he was struck by it. On seeing the Marquis, a painful blush rose to Christiane's face. There was a sort of embarrassment between them and they felt very far away from each other for a moment. Madame de Blanzac was the first to recover.

"Well, what happened?" she asked, looking straight at him and speaking in a tranquil tone.

Instead of answering, Jacques knelt down in front of her and, clasping in his hands the wrist he had grasped so roughly the evening before, he exclaimed, passionately:

"Forgive me, Christiane!"

Madame de Blanzac looked at him for a few seconds, with infinite sadness in her eyes.

"Forgive you!" she repeated, "I am no more angry with you than I should be with an instrument that had wounded me. My resentment ought rather to be against Him who decided my destiny and sent me, yesterday, to that greenhouse. Resentment would be stupid, though, as I do not know the reason of things, nor yet the final word. I believe in justice and in divine goodness. I want to believe in all that, and

such faith at the present moment is certainly meritorious. I only hope it may be reckoned in my favour. Do you remember what you said to me the other day: 'Everything has to be bought and paid for.' Well, I have simply paid, that is all. Do not let us talk about that any more. Sit down," added Christiane, freeing her hands.

Jacques obeyed mechanically. The Duchess's tone and her face, from which every reflection of love had disappeared, made such an impression on him that he did not insist.

"What happened between you and your wife?" Madame de Blanzac asked again, and then, with a shade of irony, she added:

"Have you obtained forgiveness?"

"I did not ask for it," replied the Marquis, with a certain dignity. "I simply told her the truth. I am guilty, but I do not care to appear vile. I then offered to give Annie back her liberty. She declared that, on account of the child and of her family, she did not wish for a divorce. I must confess that this decision lifted a great weight from my heart. Neither you nor I could have endured the scandal of a divorce suit."

"No, probably not."

"She has given me her word to keep absolute silence about what has passed, and I am sure she will keep her promise. She would be able to find as a pretext for breaking off her friendship with you, the way you had criticised American women. Every one knows how susceptible she is on that subject, so that it would be quite plausible. She is going to Blonay and you are going to Deauville, so that, until next season, you would not meet. Between now and then——"

"Yes, between now and then," repeated the Duchess,

slowly, and then, as though suddenly seized with a sudden fear, she asked:

"And did your wife not exact anything?" Christiane looked fixedly at the Marquis, as she asked this question.

"Nothing at all. She merely stipulated that she and I should live separate lives. That, of course, goes without saying."

"You are still going to America on the first of July?"

"No, all that is changed. Annie does not care to go to America at present. She thinks we might go with the Keradieus to Sweden and to Norway. As she has often regretted that we were not going with them, the change of plan will not seem very extraordinary."

Jacques took a low seat near the Duchess and, raising her hands to his lips, kissed them several times, without her attempting to withdraw them.

"And what about you, Christiane, what are you going to do?" he asked, in a troubled voice.

"What am I going to do?" she said, lifting her head. "Oh, do not trouble about me. I have put myself, body and soul, into the hands of Dr. Moreau."

"You have told him——?"

"Everything. He understands human nature as well as a priest and he is quite safe. I needed a man like him to help me, through this crisis—either to cure myself or to die."

"To cure yourself?" exclaimed Jacques. "Do you mean to destroy the love which is all my happiness? Oh, Christiane, you are not going to try that?"

"Would you rather I died?"

"No, you have no right to take yourself away from me again, either by death or by trying to forget the past. You belong to me and you know how dearly I love you. You are the one passionate love of my life. The kiss that maddened you was only a husband's kiss. Cannot you understand now?"

The Duchess turned still paler.

"Yes, a husband's kiss," she said, "a more divine and holier kiss than that of a lover, the kiss that creates. The one I had longed for from you," she added, looking down again, while an adorable blush covered her face.

Jacques was moved to the very depths of his soul. He bent over her hands, which he was still holding, and kissed them very tenderly and respectfully.

"I do not know," continued Christiane, "if I shall be able to forget you, but I do know that I can never again be yours. I had never really felt before that you belonged to another woman. I can no longer doubt it. You saw the effect that this brutal fact had on me. Do you imagine that I could endure this humiliating and painful sharing of your affections?"

"It is no longer a question of sharing——"

Madame de Blanzac shrugged her shoulders.

"The separation of a husband and wife, living under the same roof, could not last very long. Besides, if you are to have any more children, you will be irresistibly drawn towards Annie. She will forgive you, because she loves you, and you will soon be in each other's arms again. Such is life and such is the law of things. I have gone against this law once, but I shall not brave it again. For my own dignity's sake, I give you back your liberty. It is not so hard to do this now, of my own free will, as to be compelled,

later on, by circumstances. I would rather, too, that our love should be cut off in its flower than feel it slowly die. I am sorry about my violence, for Annie's sake. At present, the contempt she feels for you will dominate her grief, but her grief will reassert itself. Poor girl, I feel as though I have hurt a child. If she were only French, I would go to her and I should be able to alleviate her sorrow, but I know that she would not understand me."

"No," agreed the Marquis, "she would not understand you and it would only make matters worse for you to attempt to see her."

"Well, then, we must leave time to do its work. I have promised Dr. Moreau not to trouble about the future, but just to live from day to day. I am going to try to compel my mind to this discipline. You had better do the same. We cannot divine what will or what will not happen. And now, *mon ami*," she added, freeing her hands again from those of Jacques, "we must say farewell."

"Never!" exclaimed the Marquis. "I shall see you again. You think you can uproot our love in this way? Ah, no, it is too deeply and firmly planted within us; it has become a part of ourselves. Do it, if you can. I am quite easy on that score, though. Everything here will speak to you of me and of us. The memories which will emanate from every single thing will affect you, will make you relent, and will win you back again."

"If they are as dangerous as all that, I will sell La Rosette, or I will pull the house down."

"You are cruel!"

"Such is man's egoism! You want me to go on loving you, knowing that this love can only bring me

sorrow. You ought to want me to forget, so that I might get back my peace of mind."

"No, I am not virtuous enough for that."

Christiane rose and, with intentional hardness in her voice, said:

"We must break everything off."

"Give me some hope."

"No, I can give you none. You must accustom yourself to the idea of a definite rupture between us, and try to accept it as bravely as possible."

Jacques, who was also standing up, looked at the Duchess a few seconds in silence. He had never seen her look so charming, so absolutely unlike any other woman. Under the influence of memories which seemed to be a part of his very being, he took her in his arms and pressed her to his heart, again and again. She did not resist, but her lips remained cold under his kisses, her body inert, and there was no answering vibration.

Jacques' arms fell in amazement and he drew back, his face pale with emotion.

"You no longer feel anything then," he said, in a hoarse voice. "Farewell, if that is so."

He went away, without another word, possessed by that savage anger which a man feels when he is defeated, an anger which dominates all other sentiments. As soon as the door closed, Christiane stretched out her arms.

"Jacques," she cried, with her whole heart and soul.

The drawing-room was very large and her voice was lost in it. Christiane shuddered, for she had a sensation of utter loneliness and of the end of things. Then, with her head bent and almost staggering like some poor, wounded creature, she went away to her room.

CHAPTER XXIII

ANNIE's resentment had been somewhat lessened by Jacques' confession. Although her happiness was over, it was some consolation to know that she had not been married solely for her money. She wrote at once to her mother and told her, without giving any reason, that their plans were changed and that they had decided to go to Sweden and Norway with the Keradieus. It cost her a great deal to write this letter, and several times she had to wipe her eyes, as they were misty with tears.

During the six weeks' excursion with her friends, Annie tried to enjoy herself and to take an interest in what she saw. For the first time in her life, there was something in her very soul which seemed to deaden all curiosity, make her quite indifferent to places and people, something which took from her all enjoyment of life. Her inability to get rid of this something made her furious with herself. As she had said, she was a bad actress, and it was very difficult for her to appear natural with Jacques. When he spoke to her, she always felt inclined to ask him how he dared. By dint of tact and of his strong will, the Marquis succeeded in making her play her part more easily and give to their intercourse the necessary tone. This was a great point gained.

The Keradieus were very much astonished to see

their friends giving up the journey to America in such a sudden way. They were not long in perceiving the difference in the young couple's behaviour to each other. Monsieur de Keradieu said nothing, but he felt sure that there had been a serious rupture and he was convinced that Madame de Blanzac had something to do with it.

It was a great relief to the young Marchioness when once she was back at Blonay. She felt that people really cared for her there. She felt a certain protection, too, in a whole crowd of things, in the affection of her mother-in-law, the friendship of the priest, and the respect of every one. The consciousness of her own importance was a sort of compensation to her. Her duties as lady of the manor took her a great deal out of herself, so that she had not time to brood much over the wrong her husband had done her and the shameful conduct of the Duchess, and all this was certainly for the best.

Jacques followed the line of conduct he had laid down for himself unswervingly, and made no attempt to regain the good graces of his wife. He went to her rooms at the hour when the child was brought to her, and talked then as though nothing had happened. He rode out with her nearly every day, and did all in his power to make the ride as pleasant as possible. Annie had tried, at first, to repel him by her silence and stiffness, but he had not appeared to notice this. Although she received his attentions with studied indifference and a kind of disdain, they gave her pleasure all the same. She never locked her door, knowing that Jacques would never cross the threshold without her permission. Whenever she heard his footsteps in the corridor leading to their rooms, though, she always

felt a certain emotion, and when she heard him pass by without knocking, her heart was very heavy.

Annie began to read novels which analysed the passion of love. The various stories of adulterous love made her suffer horribly, but still she wanted to know more about it. Sometimes the book would fall from her hand and she would stop, in the very middle of the story, to reflect that it was in this way that her husband had loved Madame de Blanzac. He had said similar words to her, had taken her in his arms, and she had been his. The idea of all this disgusted her and she wondered how any wife could forgive and forget.

Although Annie and Jacques were very much on their guard in the presence of Madame d'Anguilhon, she was not long in discovering that things were not as they used to be. Annie was quite unconscious of it, but her face reflected the resentment and the anger and sorrow she felt. Her gaiety, too, sounded hollow. She never spoke of the Duchess now, and if any one mentioned her she would press her lips together, as though to prevent herself from speaking, and her face would take a hard expression. Nothing of this escaped Jacques' mother. She almost guessed the truth, and all the more readily as the intimacy between her son and Madame de Blanzac had made her rather uneasy. It was all in vain that Annie told her the story about her quarrel with Christiane, on the subject of American women. Madame d'Anguilhon did not believe it, but she kept her suspicions to herself, and was doubly kind and tender to her daughter-in-law.

Among the portraits of the Anguilhon family was that of a woman, famous in all the eighteenth-century memoirs. Though her husband was openly unfaithful

to her, she had never ceased to love him. When he fell into disgrace with the king, whose minister he was, she employed all the resources of her heart and mind in consoling him and in interesting him in other things. Later on, she defended him successfully before the revolutionary tribunal.

Annie knew this story. She had often admired the noble-looking face of the "Grande Marquise," as she was always called. Jacques had once told her that she was his favourite ancestress and that, as a child, he had thrown her any number of kisses. This portrait annoyed her now. When she passed by it, she would walk more quickly, looking at it sideways, in a most comical manner. It seemed to be reproaching her and she would say to herself, furiously: "I am no heroine, it would be the climax if I were!" As she was very human, though, she could not help feeling a certain satisfaction at the thought that other Marchionesses d'Anguilhon had been treated as she had been. They were French women and were beautiful and witty, but they had had the same fate. This was almost a consolation to her.

The Marquis d'Anguilhon went to Paris from time to time, and Annie imagined that it was to meet the Duchess. During his absence, she had a pang at her heart all the time. When he returned, she felt suddenly relieved. She was ashamed of herself for her weakness, but she could not help it.

Grief developed Annie's inner life better than years of happiness would have done. Compelled as she was to fall back upon herself, she began to reflect about things and, as a natural consequence, she talked less and thought more. She took great pleasure in the society of the priest and liked arguing with him. He

tried to lead her towards the regions of Christian idealism. She never went very far in that direction, but, after they had talked together for a time, the things of this world and her own grief seemed of much less importance than before. She liked the way he always called her "my child" and she began to think that the blessings he was constantly calling down on her must bring her happiness.

The Marquis was certainly more to be pitied than his wife. His conscience reproached him for having spoilt Annie's life and made a sort of widow of her. His money, his thoroughbreds, his hunting equipage, and indeed everything which he owed to her, weighed on his mind. When, in accordance with a clause of the marriage contract, he was obliged to sign one of the big American cheques, he felt something very much like shame. He could not help admiring Annie's attitude. Not only had she religiously kept the secret of his unfaithfulness, but she never made any allusions which would have been hurtful to him, or indulged in any little sarcasms which might have been some relief to her own resentment. He was grateful to her for this. The husband within him finally began to find the divorce hard. He began to think how charming Annie used to look on waking in the morning. Young and healthy as she was, her face flushed with her sleep and a halo of curly hair round her forehead, she was certainly very pretty then, and never had the Marquis felt her charm so much as now. When she was nursing little Philippe, he would kneel down in front of her and kiss the child passionately, hoping that his caresses might touch the mother's heart. When he met Annie's cold glance and saw her impassive face, he felt defeated and repulsed.

On the other hand he could not forget Christiane and he could not bring himself to believe that their intercourse was over forever. He fully realised that his life would be terribly empty without her. He often wrote to her, but she never answered his letters, and it was all in vain that he beseeched her to let him come to La Rosette.

Between these two women, who kept him at a distance with equal tenacity, he felt almost ridiculous. He was tempted to pack his trunks and fly to the other end of the world. He began to think of Africa once more. It seemed to him like a supreme refuge, as it would give him the opportunity of rehabilitating himself in his own eyes.

The Duchess really suffered much more than Jacques and Annie. She had no child, no living consolation, as it were, and then she loved the Marquis. In spite of her efforts, her whole being yearned towards him. His letters, which she did not answer, gave her that sensation of violent happiness which had become necessary to her. She drank in the love with which they were impregnated and again she stretched out her arms to him. She felt the absolute necessity of the sacrifice she was making, though, and she tried to resign herself to it. The remembrance of her mad act was peculiarly painful to her. It humiliated and crushed her and, every time she thought of it, the colour would rise to her face, and she would ask herself once more how she could have done such a thing. At times she hoped for the reconciliation of Jacques and his wife and decided that she would help to bring it about. At other moments she dreaded to hear that it had taken place.

Absorbed by all these thoughts, which crowded to

her mind one after another, Christiane often looked like a somnambulist. She was nearly always looking down when she walked now, her eyes had no longer their decided expression, and her whole body had lost something of its proud dignity. Her friends noticed how strange she was and thought her very much changed. Guy de Nozay guessed that she had had a great sorrow and that Jacques was the cause of it. He did everything he could to divert her mind and he succeeded in this sometimes.

Dr. Moreau went with the Duchess to Deauville. He tended her physically and morally with marvellous skill. He tried to make her use the great faculties of her mind and he also tried to raise her in her own estimation. He fought against Jacques' influence, against love itself, pointing out to her that this sentiment, which concentrates all the thoughts of one creature on another creature, is selfish and petty. She would smile at this argument and answer: "Selfish and petty, if you like, but all the same it is very sweet and very powerful."

Philosophy and humanitarian ideas most certainly elevated Christiane's mind, but they did not console her as simple faith might have done.

CHAPTER XXIV

NINE months had passed by. Annie had said that she was no heroine and the abnormal existence that she had accepted began to weigh upon her. It seemed to her that she was living a perpetual lie. She was hurt that Jacques made no attempt to obtain her forgiveness. The idea that he had probably not broken off his connection with the Duchess exasperated her; and her irritation began to manifest itself by fits of silence and a certain asperity. One day, when she had said something hurtful to her husband, he looked at her with a sad expression in his eyes.

"What is the good of that, Annie?" he said. "If you can no longer bear my presence, I am quite ready to give you back your liberty, but I cannot tolerate that tone, either from you or any one."

His wife avenged herself by a disdainful shrug of her shoulders, but the situation caused her still more pain and anger after this remark.

The Marquis and Marchioness d'Anguilhon spent the winter at Pau. Neither of them would have cared to face the memories which Cannes would have brought to them.

Urged on by the ungovernable feminine instinct, Annie tried to excite Jacques' jealousy and make him suffer in his turn. She began to flirt with a young man, who appeared to be very much in love with her.

God only knew how little she felt inclined for flirtation. The Marquis let her go on for some little time, watching her from a distance. The day came, though, when he pulled the reins with a very firm hand.

"You are playing a dangerous game," he said. "This young idiot will soon compromise you. The scandal would be worse for you than obtaining a divorce from me, as the fault would be on your side."

Annie did not reply. She felt that she was in the wrong and was rather ashamed of herself.

Poor Catherine was the one to get the brunt of her bad temper. The old servant had been wonderfully patient. She had thought, at first, that there had been a lovers' quarrel, but, as time went on, she saw that it was more than that and she guessed the cause. She always looked at the Marquis now with such indignation and reproach in her eyes that he did not care to meet her.

Jacques dreaded the return to Paris quite as much as his wife did. When Annie expressed a wish to spend the season in England, he was delighted. It was decided that they should take little Philippe to Blonay, where Madame d'Anguilhon was staying, and remain there until it was time to start for London. They left Pau towards the end of March, intending to spend four or five days in Paris. They both knew that the Duchess de Blanzac was not yet back in the Rue de Varenne.

On the day of their arrival, they lunched with the Keradieus. The Baroness asked them, as a personal favour, to go to a ball that was being given the following day at the Hôtel Continental. It was organised by the Duchess de Retz and was for the benefit of a new *crèche*. It was to be a very fashionable

affair and at the same time very exclusive. Annie was always ready for anything that would divert her mind from her own worries, so that she did not need any persuasion.

The *Figaro* and the *Gaulois* had devoted a whole column to this fête and had so well succeeded in exciting the charitable feelings of some, and the vanity of others, that the tickets were in great demand, although they cost a hundred francs each.

The next evening, the Marquis and the Marchioness d'Anguilhon arrived at the Hôtel Continental about eleven o'clock. They stood still a few minutes at the entrance to the large drawing-room, in order to take in the general effect.

"It is superb!" exclaimed Jacques, with a shade of irony in his voice.

The gilding, the marble, the flood of electric light, the gorgeous dresses with a profusion of jewellery and diamonds made up a somewhat garish picture, in the midst of which it was a pleasure to distinguish a few aristocratic figures and just a few ladies dressed in perfect taste.

Two foreign-looking young men were standing in front of Jacques and Annie.

"What a nation!" exclaimed one of them, shrugging his shoulders. "There are no longer any people but *rastaquouères and demi-mondaines,*" he added, in a contemptuous tone.

These words were uttered in a low voice, but they reached Jacques' ear. The blood mounted to his face, his eyes flashed ominously, and his hand came down heavily on the young man's shoulder.

"Monsieur, what do you mean—?" began the young foreigner, turning round quickly.

"I mean that there are still some gentlemen in France, and I am ready to prove it to you, whenever you like," replied Jacques. "Consider this a challenge."

The two young men were completely taken aback.

"Monsieur!" they both exclaimed.

"Here is my card," continued the Marquis. "In half an hour's time, I shall be at the Jockey Club with my seconds. You can send me yours."

The young man was visibly disconcerted by this adventure. He bowed and gave his card in his turn. Jacques took it, bowed slightly, and moved on with Annie. She was very pale and completely upset.

"I am sorry that you should have been present at that scene," said Jacques, "but I could not help it."

"You are going to fight a duel?"

"Did you hear what he said?"

Annie nodded.

"And you ask me if I am going to fight a duel? Why, there is no Frenchman who would not do the same."

The Marchioness was hurt by her husband's tone. She drew herself up and tightened her lips.

"Well, take me to the Keradieus," she said, trying to speak indifferently.

When the Baron heard what had taken place, he placed himself at his friend's service. The two men left their wives in charge of a relative who happened to be there and went to their club. They hoped to find Guy de Nozay there and the stranger's seconds.

CHAPTER XXV

THE Duchess de Blanzac had been summoned by her lawyer on urgent business, and had arrived in Paris on the morning of the day which was to end so strangely for Jacques. Whenever she came like this alone, she always asked her uncle to take her in. The house in which he lived, at the bottom of her garden, had a separate entrance, and this made it more easy for her to come without any one knowing she was there. On hearing that the Anguilhons, whom she believed to be still at Pau, were in Paris, she was greatly disturbed in her mind and she decided that she would leave at an early hour the next day. After dining alone with her uncle, she went to the Place Vendôme, to call on one of her relatives, the Marchioness d'Alby, a kind-hearted old lady who was always at home to her friends every evening.

Towards midnight, some of the people who had been to the ball at the Hôtel Continental were telling about it. Count de Rueil told Madame de Blanzac privately about the Marquis d'Anguilhon's provocation and added that a very serious duel would probably be the result. By an extraordinary effort of will-power, Christiane managed to master her emotion and to learn all the details.

"You say they are all to meet at the Jockey Club?" she asked.

"Yes, they are there now. It is very probable that the affair will come off to-morrow."

Christiane was seized with a wild desire to see Jacques at any cost. Her plan was soon made. She slipped into the library, took a sheet of paper, and wrote the following words:

"I have just heard what occurred at the Continental. I must see you for a second. I am waiting for you below, in my carriage."

After putting her note into an envelope, she returned to the drawing-room, took leave quietly of the Marchioness d'Alby, and managed to get away without attracting attention. It was nearly one o'clock in the morning then. Five minutes later, her carriage drew up in the Rue Scribe, a few steps away from the Jockey Club. She gave her missive to the footman, with orders to deliver it into the Marquis's own hands. Then she waited, her heart beating so violently that it seemed to her she could hear it outside herself.

After a few minutes, Jacques came. She opened the door for him herself, invited him to get in the carriage, and then gave her orders to the footman.

"Drive slowly down the Boulevard and along the Rue Royale, I will tell you where to stop."

"Christiane, my darling," exclaimed Jacques, seizing the Duchess in his arms, "how did you get here?"

"Oh, that does not matter," answered Madame de Blanzac, freeing herself from his embrace. "When are you fighting your duel? Do not tell me wrongly," she added, imperiously.

Jacques hesitated a moment and then, meeting the large blue eyes, so full of light, he answered:

"To-morrow, at nine o'clock in de Nolles' garden at St. Germain."

"What weapon?"

"The sword."

Christiane breathed more freely. A duel with swords seemed to her less brutal than with pistols and she knew, too, that the Marquis was a good swordsman.

"Who is your adversary, the gentleman who thinks that only *rastaquouères* and *demi-mondaines* are to be found in France?"

"A very decent man. He is one of the attachés to the Belgian Embassy. He is only about twenty-five or twenty-six and he spoke thoughtlessly, rather than spitefully, or with any real conviction. He has even expressed his regret, I believe. The insult was to my country, so that I could not accept any apology. The arrangements were all made very quickly, so that I hope to give the Count de Chastel what he deserves to-morrow, and modify his opinion a little about France. It will be a good day's work for me!"

Jacques' face beamed with the excitement of his patriotism and courage. He looked much younger than he really was at that moment, and the Duchess gazed at him with passionate admiration. The thought flashed across her mind that, if he were to be killed, he would never belong to another woman. The next second, she was ashamed of herself for having had such a thought.

"But you have not told me how it is that you are in Paris?" asked Jacques again.

"I was sent for on some urgent business. I intended starting away again to-morrow morning."

"Without letting me know?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, Christiane!"

"Do not let us talk about ourselves now. Does Annie know about this duel?"

"Yes, unfortunately; she was present at the scene. I shall tell her that it is for the day after to-morrow."

Madame de Blanzac could not help feeling a thrill of joy at the idea that she alone would be suffering on Jacques' account and keeping the vigil that night.

They were now driving along the Rue Royale.

"Where shall I drop you?" she asked.

"At the Club again. Nozay and Keradieu are waiting for me there."

The Duchess gave the necessary order and the carriage turned in the direction of the Rue Scribe. The Marquis put his arm round Christiane's shoulders and drew her to him. The great silence of perfect communion of souls fell between them and they experienced a moment of extraordinary and absolutely pure happiness. The stopping of the carriage put an end to their ecstasy. They gazed at each other for a few seconds as though each would have liked to carry the other away. Jacques then kissed the hand that lay in his.

"Farewell, my beloved one," he said, in a changed voice.

"Farewell. Do not keep me waiting a minute longer than necessary to-morrow, for the result. May God help you!"

The Marquis got out of the carriage, closed the door after him very slowly, and then stood bareheaded until it moved away. Christiane leaned forward for a last look at him and then threw herself back in the carriage. She had felt that sudden wrench at her heart which is the harbinger of eternal separations.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE Marquis d'Anguilhon and his two friends went back to the Hôtel Continental from the Club. In the most natural way possible, they explained that, as the Count de Chastel had not been able to get his other second, the arrangements would have to be made the following morning. This seemed such a likely story that Annie did not doubt it. During their drive home, Jacques chatted in a lively way, in order to reassure her. He did not succeed in diverting her thoughts from the duel, though.

"Are you a good swordsman?" she asked, suddenly.

"Yes, I am pretty good," he answered.

"And a good shot?"

"I am not a bad shot."

"What a horrible thing!" exclaimed the young wife, as though talking to herself.

"What, duelling? What would an American have done in my place?"

"Knocked the man down."

"Well, it seems to me that our method of proceeding is less barbarous. In the first place, it rouses courage, and courage redeems the insult and increases the dignity of the one who has been insulted. I assure you that duels do good. They stir the soul. A man has to put his affairs in order, he thinks over his past life and makes good resolutions for the future. He

may not keep the good resolutions," he added, with a smile, "but at any rate he makes them, and that is a step towards wisdom."

"Have you ever fought a duel?"

"Yes, two."

"Ah!"

Annie longed to ask for whom and for what reason, but she did not dare.

"What a good thing your mother is not here!" she said.

"She would approve, I am sure."

"That would not prevent her from suffering horribly, if she only knew."

"She would suffer a great deal more if she saw me take no notice of such words as we heard to-night. You are not French, Annie, but I feel sure that you would not have liked me to act otherwise."

"No," she replied, in a decided tone, "I should not."

"I am glad to hear that."

"When are you to see these men again?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Will you promise to tell me the day and the hour of the duel?" asked Annie, in a broken voice.

Jacques hesitated a moment and then said, simply:

"Yes, I promise."

"Thank you."

This word, which implied such absolute confidence on his wife's part, caused the Marquis some remorse. He was on the point of telling her the truth, but, on reflection, he felt that it would be inflicting several hours of intense anxiety on her. She did not realise what it would mean and, considering the terms on which they now were, he felt that he ought not to allow her to suffer on his account. He therefore de-

cided to keep silence. On reaching the door of her suite of rooms, Annie turned to her husband.

"Shall you lunch at home?" she asked.

"I hope so," answered Jacques, with a half smile, "and if I do, Guy and Henri will be with me."

"Good-night," she said, and then, obeying an irresistible impulse, she held out her hand to her husband. He took it and clasped it heartily twice over. Annie went quickly into her room, as though she were ashamed of her action. Catherine was awaiting her, as usual.

"Did you enjoy yourself?" asked the old nurse, helping her off with her cloak.

"Enjoy myself!"

This question was all that was needed to make Annie give way at last to her pent-up feelings. She sank down on an armchair and the tears, which she had kept back all the evening, flowed freely at last.

"Miss Annie, Miss Annie, what is the matter?" exclaimed Catherine, in dismay. "What have they done to you?"

As her young mistress did not reply, the poor woman knelt down in front of her and began kissing her hands. Annie drew them quickly away, as she very much disliked demonstrations of this kind. Battling with herself, she tried to regain her self-possession.

"Monsieur d'Anguilhon is going to fight a duel to-morrow, no, I mean the day after to-morrow," she said, in a firm voice.

Glad to be able to relieve her own feelings by confiding in some one, she told Catherine what had taken place at the Hôtel Continental.

The Irishwoman's face, as she listened, expressed all kinds of feelings,

"Monsieur le Marquis was quite right," she said, getting up.

"Yes, I know that, but he will be risking his life."

"There is a good God above us and the Holy Virgin," said Catherine, with all the conviction of that faith which transports mountains.

Guided by her tact and by her almost maternal affection, she succeeded in tranquillising her young mistress. When Annie was in bed, Catherine kissed her and said:

"Sleep well, my darling. I will go quite early to Notre-Dame des Victoires. I will have a mass said and a candle burnt."

This idea seemed so childish to Annie that she could not help smiling.

As soon as she was alone, she tried to go to sleep, but in the silence and darkness her brain was still more active. The scene at the Hôtel Continental came to her mind again. She saw her husband turn suddenly pale and she saw the savage expression on his face, as he listened to the foreigner's words.

"Oh, no," she thought, "he would never accept an apology, he is sure to fight."

She tried to remember the details of the various duels about which she had read. A few weeks previously, there had been one on the Grande Jatte Island, which had ended fatally. An illustrated paper had given a picture of the young man lying dead on the billiard-table of a restaurant. She had been very much impressed by the horror of it and now the thought of this picture quite upset her. Duelling seemed distinctly barbarous to her. Just now, in the carriage, she had been very brave, but at present she

felt quite faint. On seeing her husband threatened by danger, she had drawn nearer to him, instinctively, forgetting what separated them. The remembrance of her grievance came back to her in all its force. How could he have deceived her so basely? She could see no excuse for him. Was she to let him go to this duel, though, without a friendly word? That meant that she must forgive him. She said to herself that this would be impossible, but even as she said the words the idea that it was her duty to forgive him formulated itself clearly in her conscience. This sentiment of duty revealed to her suddenly the grandeur of her title as wife. Her rights over Jacques were very much above those of a mistress. The odiousness of this name of mistress gave her pleasure. With childish satisfaction, she recalled the fact that she had been married three times: once before the Mayor, once before the Consul of the United States, and then before the Catholic Bishop. The beautiful formula of the English marriage service came to her mind: "to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part." Ah, that was indeed a bond and she certainly ought to forgive. How happy she felt, too, to be *obliged* to do so! If her husband were to be killed, she would then have no remorse. At the bare idea of the awful possibility of her husband being killed, all petty feelings vanished from Annie's mind and the love she had tried to drive away returned in all its force, like a ray of sunshine. As soon as she woke in the morning, she would go to Jacques. She did not know what she would say to him, but she was sure he would understand.

As soon as she had made this resolution, she had a sensation of infinite peace and well-being, and she went to sleep with the divine joy of forgiveness in her heart.

CHAPTER XXVII

On entering his room, the Marquis d'Anguilhon gave orders to his valet to call him at seven o'clock punctually, and then dismissed him. He sat down for a few minutes near the fire and then, getting up, began to pace up and down the room with long strides.

"Only *rastaquouères* and *demi-mondaines* left in France," he muttered between his clenched teeth. The words once more roused savage anger within him. He had thought that he no longer cared for this republican France, ruled by the *bourgeoisie*. He had paid his debt, in the way of military service, grudgingly, and he had imagined that he no longer cared what happened to his country. This evening, though, when he had heard it insulted, the blood had rushed to his face, as though he had been attacked personally. He had realised then how dear it was to him, dearer than mother, son, or wife, dearer than everything else. And he was going to fight for his country. The thought of this filled his heart with joy and lighted up his face. The old saying which declared that there would always be love, glory, and money for a d'Anguilhon was proved true once more. The glory had now come.

As he said this to himself, he sat down again near the fire. His excitement soon died away. He thought of the past and of the future and gradually, from the

very depths of his soul, came a longing to die. Life without Christiane would be too painful, and with her, too base. The impression he had had during their last interview came back to him. He felt very distinctly that they had seen each other for the last time, and that their farewell had been final. Yes, he should probably be killed. It did not matter, though, as he was leaving a son, so that everything was satisfactory. It would be a noble death, the noblest he could imagine. For a few moments, a gloomy and sorrowful expression came over the face of the Marquis. He was probably thinking over all the things he cared for, and he still cared for many things in this world. Then, suddenly, as though the sacrifice were now made, his face lighted up once more. He drew himself up with a proud gesture and went across to his writing-table.

Jacques now made his will. With moist eyes, he then wrote to his mother and to his wife. In his letter to Annie, he confided to her the honour of his name, his mother, his child, all that was most precious to him. He then wrote a few lines for his son. When he had done this, he looked through his drawers and burnt various papers. As he went on, his face gradually became more calm and resolute. When he had quite finished, he took a last look round, and he then left his study, convinced that he should never see it again.

The Marquis had less than three hours' sleep. This was quite enough, though, to revive him. His bath gave to his limbs the elasticity they needed. He felt strong, in good form, and in possession of all his powers. His eyes were bright and clear. Never had any rendezvous in his love affairs put such fire into his eyes, nor so triumphant an expression on his face.

Jacques was to go first to the Rue Vaneau and call for Monsieur de Keradieu, Guy de Nozay, and the surgeon. Before leaving, he went to the nursery to kiss his boy. When he opened the door, the child, who was already dressed, ran to him. Jacques lifted him up, held him at arm's length for a moment, and then stood him up on the table. He gazed at the sturdy lad with great pride.

"Where are you going?" asked the child, aware that these early visits of his father usually meant his departure.

"Not far from here just now, but later on, perhaps very, very far."

"Oh, no, not far," pleaded the little one, with a distressed look.

"You must promise to be very good while I am away," said the Marquis, in an authoritative tone. "You must not give your mother any trouble and you must always obey her," he continued. "Do you promise?"

"Yes," answered the child.

"Then give me a kiss, one of your very biggest."

Philippe adored his father and did not require asking twice. He threw his little arms round his neck, hugging and kissing him with all his might.

Jacques' eyes were misty with tears when he lifted the boy down. He put his hand on the child's head for a moment, in sign of blessing, and then turned to go away. Philippe clung to his legs and looked up at him, with the beautiful, golden brown eyes of the Anguilhons.

"Not far away, please," pleaded the child.

The Marquis was very deeply affected. He freed himself from the boy's embrace, kissed him once

more, and went away, without daring to look round again.

"He will remember me," he thought, with satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXVIII

At the very moment when Jacques left the house, Annie woke with a start, as though warned by some secret voice. She at once recalled what had taken place the previous evening. She must see Jacques before the arrival of his seconds. She sprang out of bed and dressed quickly. At the thought of what she was going to do, a furtive blush came to her face, and her fingers trembled in tying her ribbons and arranging her hair. In spite of her anxiety, she looked at herself in the glass and tried to make herself look as pretty as possible. As soon as she was ready, she went, with a beating heart, and knocked at her husband's dressing-room door. As she received no answer, she ventured to go in. Not only was Jacques not there, but the room was already in order. It looked as though he had not slept there. She rang the bell and, in reply to her questions, was informed that her husband had left the house without giving any orders.

She went back to her room, feeling sad and disappointed, but without suspecting the truth. Jacques had promised to tell her the day and hour of the duel. This promise appeared to her sacred and she never even imagined it possible to break it. She paced up and down her room for a few minutes and then sent for little Philippe. The child climbed on to her lap at once, nestled up to her, and said, in a sorrowful little voice:

"Papa gone!"

"Gone!" The word was like a blow to Annie. It seemed to echo in her heart.

"Where has papa gone?" she asked the child, in an altered voice.

"P'raps very far——"

Annie put the child down and, to his great grief, called Catherine to take him back to the nursery.

She had been deceived once more! He had very likely gone to fight the duel.

When Catherine came back from the nursery, Annie asked her briefly:

"What have you heard?"

"Nothing," replied Catherine, "except that Monsieur le Marquis went into the nursery to kiss baby before going out."

"Give me my hat. I am going to the Keradieus'. I must know what is happening."

Just at this moment, Madame de Keradieu arrived. She was about to kiss Annie, as usual, but the latter pushed her aside abruptly.

"The duel was for this morning. You have all deceived me. It is abominable."

"We wanted to spare you a cruel anxiety," said Madame de Keradieu, gently.

"Ah, you do not know all that it means!" exclaimed Annie.

The thought that she had not been reconciled with her husband caused her the most violent grief. Madame de Keradieu tried to comfort her by telling her that Jacques was an excellent swordsman, that he was in very good practice, and that he had his two best friends as seconds.

"What time is it to take place?" asked Annie.

"At half past nine. The meeting is at St. Germain. It is ten o'clock now, so that we shall soon have news. Henri is to send me a wire."

By way of diverting Annie's thoughts, Madame de Keradieu told her all that had taken place at the Club. Half an hour passed and still the telegram had not arrived. The two women sat there waiting in great suspense, and the silence that fell between them was full of anguish.

Presently Annie heard the sound of carriage wheels.

"Here they are!" she exclaimed.

They rushed to the hall and Antoinette de Keradieu went outside to hear the first news. Annie stood still, as though paralysed, gazing at the door. At the end of a few seconds, her friend returned, accompanied by Guy de Nozay.

"Do not be alarmed!" cried the latter.

"Jacques?"

"Safe, but not quite sound. He is wounded, but not seriously."

Annie turned pale.

"You are probably deceiving me again," she said, with trembling lips.

Guy took her hands in his.

"Look at me," he said. "Do I look like a man threatened with losing his dearest friend?"

Annie felt reassured.

"Your husband is slightly wounded just above the left lung. It is very likely that the surgeon will not allow him to be brought back to Paris to-day. He is at de Nolles' and in good hands. I have come to fetch you both," added the Viscount, looking at Madame de Keradieu.

"And what about Jacques' adversary?" she asked.

"Ah, poor fellow, he will have some difficulty in getting over it."

Annie never thought of expressing any pity for the Count de Chastel.

"I will go and get ready," she said.

On entering her bedroom, she found Catherine there. Throwing her arms round her nurse's neck, she said:

"He is wounded. Go and burn candles at Notre-Dame des Victoires. Pray to all your saints, do everything, everything, so that he shall not die."

She, too, had become a child again, in her distress.

"He will not die, my dear," answered Catherine, with her admirable faith.

On the way from Paris to St. Germain, Guy told the two women all the incidents of the affair.

"It was one of the finest duels I ever witnessed," he said. "Such courage and generosity on both sides —Jacques was foolishly rash, though. He positively played with death. It is a perfect miracle that he got off so well."

These words filled Annie's heart with remorse.

"Is this Belgian seriously wounded?" asked Madame de Keradieu.

"I am afraid so. He was wounded in the region of the liver. They were obliged to take him to the Henri IV pavilion. I hope he will get over it, as much for Jacques' sake as his own. It cannot be very comfortable, as Madame d'Anguilhon would say," added Guy, with a smile, "to have a man's death on your conscience, and especially when he is a very decent man, as this one is. He had left a letter with his seconds, in which he expressed his regret and offered an apology. How rash and yet how fine youth is!"

The nearer they got to the end of their journey, the

more disturbed was Annie in her mind. What sort of a welcome would her husband give her? Would he be glad to see her? How she would nurse him and watch over him!

A carriage was awaiting the travellers at the station and Monsieur de Keradieu was there to meet them. On arriving at the house, the Prince de Nolles welcomed the Marchioness with a few affectionate words.

"Summon up all your American coolness," he said. "A wounded man is always an alarming sight, but I assure you there is nothing to fear."

He then opened a door on the ground floor and showed Annie into a drawing-room. She went forward a few steps and then stood still, as though nailed to the spot, her eyes dilating under the influence of the strongest and most powerful sentiments in human nature.

At the far end of the room, Jacques was lying with closed eyelids on a wide divan. He was deadly pale and his features were drawn with suffering. At his side, with her fingers on his pulse, was—the Duchess de Blanzac.

This was enough to deprive Jacques' wife not only of the use of her limbs, but of her reason. Her first idea was to go away again, but on looking again at her husband, she believed that he was dying. Remembering that she was his wife, she resolved to assert her rights, and she advanced towards the bed.

"This is my place," she said to Christiane, looking at her unflinchingly, and speaking in a hard voice.

"I am aware of that and was waiting to give it up to you. You can take your place."

As she said this, the Duchess rose. She had that expression on her face which made her sometimes

appear, as people said, "crushing." She moved away at once and, advancing towards the Keradieus, began to speak to them of the wounded man in the most natural way, without appearing to notice their looks of consternation. The Prince de Nolles had not witnessed the scene between the two women and he tried to persuade the Duchess to stay to luncheon. She declined and asked the Viscount de Nozay to drive her back to Paris.

When they were on the way, Guy told Christiane that, according to the promise he had made Jacques before the duel, he had sent her a wire, and that he was then going to take her news of the wounded man.

"Your presence there quite upset me," he said. "How imprudent it was!"

It was the first time that he had made a direct allusion to her *liaison* with the Marquis, showing that he knew the reason of her rupture with Annie. Christiane coloured slightly.

"Imprudence?" she repeated, for the sake of saying something.

"Yes, for you ran the risk of receiving an affront."

The Duchess laid her hand on that of the young man.

"You need never fear that, my friend," she said. "You know very well that no one would offer me an affront."

"Your being present at the place where the duel was to take place will compromise you horribly. It was very foolish!" said Guy, crossly.

Like most men, he did not like a woman to trifle with her reputation. The Duchess shrugged her shoulders.

"If you only knew how little I care whether I compromise myself or not!"

"You have come to that?" said the young man in a distressed tone.

"To that and much more. How much more, you could never imagine."

"Well, but how was it you were at St. Germain?"

"Yesterday, about midnight, I was at Madame d'Alby's and I heard what had taken place at the Hôtel Continental. I managed to see Jacques for an instant and to make him give me the details. All night long, my brain was working to such a degree that I nearly lost my senses. I felt that I could never stay quietly at home and await the result of the duel, so I started to St. Germain. At eight o'clock, I was at Monsieur de Nolles'. You can imagine his amazement. He tried his utmost to persuade me to go away again, but I would not and he let me stay in his study. I could hear all the coming and going beforehand, and it was horrible!" The Duchess shuddered and was silent a moment.

"Some time after, I cannot tell you how long, I found myself out in the hall, just as they were carrying Jacques in. When they had laid him on the divan, he stirred and his lips moved. I bent down to hear what he was trying to say and distinctly, oh, so distinctly, I heard him pronounce Annie's name—it was his wife he wanted——"

The Duchess said this with such an expression of grief that Guy's heart melted with pity.

"I was going away then," she continued," but I saw that the surgeon was opening his case of instruments. I could not go and leave him without a woman to tend him. I stayed and arranged his pillows, wrung out the blood-stained sponges, prepared the dressings, just as a Sister of Charity would have done. It was

a new sensation for me and a delicious one. When I heard him breathe more freely, I was satisfied. Ah, to-day I penetrated to the very depths of a woman's heart and I have learnt to understand our true nature. We are nothing but mothers, after all, mothers of men, whether they be babies or grown up. The idea then came to me that, for the sake of Jacques' happiness, I must give him up. I made my sacrifice and I then waited for Annie, so that I might restore her husband to her. Do you understand?"

Guy nodded, without trusting himself to speak.

"You have pitied and blamed me, I know," continued Christiane. "Well, you can go on pitying me, but do not blame me any more, for I have been punished as severely as morality could require. And now, it is all over. I have abdicated. You saw me abdicate——"

"Like a queen," said the Viscount de Nozay, rubbing his eye-glasses energetically, instead of wiping his eyes, which were filled with tears.

CHAPTER XXIX

CHRISTIANE did not return to Blanzac. She sent for her servants and took up her abode in her town house.

The Marquis d'Anguilhon's condition caused some anxiety. He could not be moved to Paris for a week. Guy de Nozay went to see the Duchess every day and gave her the latest news of the invalid. When he told her that the doctors had pronounced him out of danger, she said quietly:

"I am very glad. That was all I wanted."

Madame de Blanzac had made a greater sacrifice than Guy imagined. She felt that, as it was impossible for Jacques and herself to be united, it was impossible for them *both* to live separated. From what Henri de Keradieu and the surgeon had told her, it was evident that Jacques had sought death. He must have felt that death was the only way out of the present difficulty. She had come to the conclusion that, if this were so, it was she who ought to die, and she decided that she would die. For many months, she had tried to accustom herself to the idea of death, but when she actually came to the edge of the abyss, her whole being, so full of strength and life, recoiled instinctively. The sweat of dread and of agony came to her brow, just as it had done to the brow of Jesus. Those who maintain that it needs more courage to live an unhappy life than to die have not tried the dying.

Christiane's weakness was not of long duration. What was there for her to regret? Her share of happiness was exhausted. There would be no more light, warmth, or love in her life. There was nothing left for her but commonplace affections and the satisfaction of vanity. Altruism might, perhaps, be a joy and consolation, but she was not perfect enough to content herself with this. Jacques and Annie would be living quite close to her, in the very next house, and she would be meeting them everywhere and would have to move in the same circle. That, above everything else, seemed absolutely impossible. The necessity of disappearing from their path seemed to the Duchess urgent, and she began to think out some way of dying in a dignified manner, without causing any scandal or giving rise to any suspicions. She did not want her uncle and her friends to have any unpleasant memories when thinking of her, and she did not want her death to be spoken of in a hushed voice, as people speak of deaths by suicide. She would not like her friends to hurry by the spot where she had breathed her last.

Christiane had always had deep religious feelings, but as she grew older there were many things that she no longer believed, and she had certain convictions of her own. She did not believe in voluntary death. She thought that the hour for the departure and for the arrival was irrevocably fixed, so that it was not in any one's power to advance or delay the fatal moment. If she were destined to die by her own hand, it was God who willed it so, and the order from on high would come to her under the form of an inspiration.

When once she had made her resolution, a great

calmness had come to Madame de Blanzac's soul. She felt now that she would have the courage to die, and the consciousness of this gave her a sort of pride and raised her in her own esteem.

Dr. Moreau was glad to see her serene expression and the elasticity of her step, which he considered an infallible sign of physical and moral health. She had told him about the scene at St. Germain and he had congratulated her warmly on her action. It was a kind of revenge that she had taken, and he attributed it to the fortunate change in her ideas. Whilst he was rejoicing at all this, Christiane was thinking about her death and quietly arranging her affairs. Under the influence of her resolution, she wrote long, minute instructions to the future master of Blanzac. She was very glad to know that Louis de Challans was worthy of the position for which his uncle had destined him. She knew the girl he loved and approved his choice. She was glad to think that he would be able to marry her.

The Duchess then made her will. This took her several days, and she realised, for the first time, how difficult it is to be perfectly just. She remembered every one—relatives, friends, and servants.

"How many people will be made happy by my death!" she said to herself, sadly. She appointed Monsieur de Keradieu her executor and left him everything at La Rosette, in memory of her. Christiane then divided her private fortune into three parts. The usufruct of one part she assigned to her uncle; that of the second part to Dr. Moreau for starting the various schemes they had planned together. She requested him to continue them with the collaboration of the future Duke de Blanzac. The third part of her

money was to be used in carrying out the schemes and for legacies and pensions. At the death of her uncle and of Dr. Moreau, her money would go to Louis de Challans. In return for this money, he was to continue the charitable works that had been founded and to bequeath them to his children at his death.

La Rosette was to be pulled down and, on its site, an educational home was to be built for twenty little girls deserted by their parents. They were to be taken into the home at a very early age and kept until they were eighteen. On leaving, they were each to be provided with a dowry of five hundred francs, a trousseau, and furniture for a little home. All the plans and the regulations for this Home were ready, and Christiane wished to have her portrait, painted by Chartran, placed in the parlour.

She then thought of herself. She would not be embalmed, and she wished Toni to place her in her shroud. The burial-place of the Blanzacs was on the site of the old castle. It was on raised ground and had a wonderfully fine aspect. Christiane did not wish to be buried in the vault, but to the right of the chapel. She did not wish to have either marble or stone above her, nothing heavy, and nothing cold. She wanted to have two coffins, one of light wood, or of wickerwork, if possible, lined with moss. This coffin was to be put in the grave, which was to be very wide and deep and built up on the three sides. Earth was then to be put over her, so that it might be "dust with dust." She wished to have the most beautiful rose-bushes from her garden transplanted into this soil, but the roses were all to be red. Around her grave were to be railings, and a large cross of wrought iron was to be put up as a symbol.

This was to be all. There would then be nothing to hinder the work of the resurrection of the body. She would still have the sun and the air which living people have, and she herself would become sap and perfume. No, there was nothing terrifying or repulsive in all this. She smiled with pleasure as she thought of the beautiful effect of the mass of vivid flowers near the old chapel.

There was a kind of voluptuousness in these thoughts of death and of the beyond, and Christiane revelled in them more and more. Like her *Addolorata,* she was holding a smiling mask in front of her real face. She attended to all her social duties, paid calls, and received callers. She was rather absent-minded, sometimes, and what people said often seemed absurd and stupid. She said to herself that she could never again be interested in empty talk and she already felt a long way off all these people and things.

The Duchess loved music passionately and could not possibly do without it. Since her return to Paris, she had not yet been once to the Opéra. When the evening for which she subscribed next came round, she decided that she would take the Keradieus and Guy de Nozay. She expected to hear *Die Walküre,* but there had been a change in the programme at the last moment and, on arriving, she saw that *Hamlet* was posted up. This name had the most extraordinary effect on her. It seemed as though each of the big, black letters stamped itself on her brain. She smiled as she said to herself that not a single person in that house could be better prepared than she was for hearing the famous work by Ambroise Thomas. Alas, she was only too well prepared for it. In the morbid state in which she was, the music could not fail to

act fatally on her mind and on her nerves. All those fine phrases, in which love and death can be felt, found an echo within her. Her face turned pale and a strange look came into her eyes. She leaned back, so that she should not be noticed. The words of Ophelia's song brought tears into her eyes and she repeated them to herself.

The Viscount de Nozay saw her emotion and refrained from looking at her. He cursed Hamlet and Ophelia, and Ambroise Thomas into the bargain, and was greatly relieved when the Opéra was over. It was about the middle of April, but there was a very bleak wind blowing that evening. Every time the doors opened and shut, this wind could be felt, and the Duchess shivered, in spite of her furs.

"Fasten your cloak," said Guy. "This wind is enough to give you pneumonia."

"Pneumonia?" repeated Madame de Blanzac.

"Yes, it is enough to kill any one after the heat inside."

When he had put her into her carriage, she held out her hand to him.

"Thank you, Monsieur de Nozay, thank you," she said, with a strange smile.

He was rather struck by the way she emphasised the words and he wondered what she had to thank him so gratefully for. Poor Guy, if he had only known that she was thanking him for suggesting to her the way she might die.

The carriage turned down the Rue de la Paix. Christiane then let down the windows, threw open her cloak, and leaned back. The wind blew into the carriage and played round her roughly. She could feel it on her beautiful shoulders, and on her bosom, throb-

bing with life. It seemed to freeze her moist skin, her flesh, and her very blood. She remained impassible, enduring the biting cold, and then her lips quivered and the tears came into her eyes.

"No, there is no such thing as voluntary death," she said to herself. "I have been called and—oh, it is hard to die."

Just before reaching home, she put up the windows again and fastened her cloak. She could be quite tranquil, the work was done, and she was stricken with death.

The next morning, Christiane awoke with a cold in her head and on her chest. Her bronchial tubes were already so inflamed that, when taking her shower-bath, it seemed to her that they must be bare wounds. She dressed and went out. The wind was as cutting as it had been the night before. She walked along aimlessly, went into the Bon Marché and bought a few things she did not want, and then returned home. By this time she ached all over and could scarcely walk. She made herself keep up, nevertheless, all day long. When night came, she was glad to go to bed, knowing full well that she would never get up again.

Three days later, it was rumoured, in social circles, that the Duchess de Blanzac was suffering from congestion of the lungs and that her life was in danger. Great consternation reigned in her household and the silence that pervaded it was of bad omen. The domestics went to and fro as though there were no longer any discipline to observe. Friends came in and out without waiting to be shown into a room or accompanied to the door.

Dr. Moreau fought the disease, inch by inch, gaining an advantage for a few hours, but losing it again later

on. Christiane was delirious at times and she would then cry out for the ice to be taken from her shoulders. Dr. Moreau was surprised at this strange impression. Guy de Nozay told him that the Duchess must have taken a chill on leaving the Opéra. He had seen her shiver and had asked her to fasten her cloak.

"You recommended her to fasten her cloak?" asked the doctor, abruptly.

"Yes, I remember quite well begging her to do so."

The doctor made no further remark. He guessed what had taken place, though, and he understood why she had this persistent sensation of icy coldness.

"Poor woman!" he murmured to himself, and from that moment he despaired of curing her and he no longer even wished that she should get well.

Between the fits of delirium, Christiane had bad attacks of choking. Morphine was given to her and this not only relieved her suffering, but gave her, for the time being, remarkable lucidity and strength. She took advantage of these moments for seeing her friends, who took it in turns to be there, day and night. They sat in the room adjoining hers. She frequently asked for Louis de Challans, as she had so many instructions to give him about her various charitable schemes, her animals, and her grave. She spoke to him of his duties and, several times over, expressed her wish for him to marry Mademoiselle de Chinon. He listened to her words, kneeling by her, and on his face was an expression of very real grief. On one occasion, she saw that he was weeping. She held her hand to his lips and said, with a smile:

"Those are beautiful tears, they are so sincere. Thank you for them."

On the seventh day, Christiane confessed and took

the sacrament. Towards noon, Dr. Moreau sounded her lungs again. His face turned very pale, for he knew the end was not far off. His patient knew it, too. She asked for Guy de Nozay, who was there now night and day. She took a pencil and, asking for a sheet of paper, wrote a few lines with great difficulty.

"Take this to Madame d'Anguilhon," she said to Guy, "and bring her here to me."

CHAPTER XXX

THE sight of the Duchess at her husband's bedside had frozen up all the love and pity in Annie's heart. Jacques had evidently not broken off his relations with this woman, even after the disgraceful scene in which she had denounced him. He had no self-respect at all then. It had not been for the sake of sparing his wife anxiety that he had concealed from her the time of the duel. He had merely preferred to have his mistress with him. Madame de Blanzac was French and would comprehend his patriotism and his heroism better than his wife could. An American woman would not be able to understand all these grand sentiments. Perhaps not, thought Annie, but at any rate she knew what honour and straightforwardness were. She was indignant with herself for having asked for her place at her husband's bedside. She felt that she ought to have gone away again. The Duchess had seemed to be restoring her husband to her. The idea of this was the climax, and she decided that she would simply leave him to his mistress and return to America. She had friends there who appreciated her and she ought never to have left them. She would just tell them that she had been mistaken, or rather that she had been deceived. She would take her child back with her, as she would have the right to keep him until he was seven years old. It was some satisfaction, at

any rate, to know that she had not married the Marquis d'Anguilhon out of ambition. It had been a love-match on her side, at any rate. How well it had turned out, her love-match! Well, the lesson she had learned might be useful to some of her countrywomen.

These thoughts filled Annie's heart with anger and bitterness and made her childlike face look remarkably hard. For the next eight days Jacques' life was in danger, and yet she felt no pity for him. She tended him, nevertheless, with an alertness and skill that won the doctor's admiration, but there was no gentleness in the touch of her hands, and no tenderness in her eyes.

Madame d'Anguilhon had received a telegram, summoning her to her son's bedside. She was surprised to find that the duel had not brought the husband and wife any nearer together.

"That is not the way to win a husband back," she said to herself sadly, as she watched her daughter-in-law.

The idea of winning her husband back would certainly never have entered Annie's head. She might have forgiven Jacques, and she had come very near this, but to do anything with the idea of winning his love again would have seemed to her like the very depth of degradation. That certainly would have been beyond her altogether.

The Marquis could not be moved for a week. The state of mental excitement he had been in at the time he was wounded made his recovery more slow and difficult. He soon noticed the extreme coldness with which Annie treated him. At times, she seemed to him like a stranger and he did not like having her there nursing him. He had a vague memory of having

seen Christiane near him. He thought, at first, that he must have been dreaming, but finally, he felt convinced that she had come to St. Germain and that his wife had met her there.

When Annie heard of Madame de Blanzac's illness, she neither felt a cruel joy, nor yet a guilty hope. Whether her rival lived or died mattered little to her. Jacques was unworthy of her own love and of her forgiveness. He no longer existed for her, and nothing could alter that fact.

She was in this frame of mind when Guy called on her. On seeing his grief-stricken face and his grave look, she had a presentiment that he had come from the Duchess, and she steeled herself to hear what he had to say.

"What is the matter?" she asked, coldly.

"Madame de Blanzac has given me this note for you. You know she is dying."

Annie took the note with visible repugnance and read it with compressed lips. It contained nothing but the following words, written with a trembling hand, which made the writing almost illegible and infinitely pathetic:

"I am about to set out on the long journey. Come and bid me farewell.

CHRISTIANE."

The young Marchioness could not help feeling a certain emotion, which she herself qualified as "horrible." She endeavoured to appear indifferent, nevertheless.

"Is she really so ill then?"

"She will probably not live through the night."

"Ah, well—will you tell her——"

"Nothing," interrupted the Viscount. "She wants to see you and I am going to take you to her."

Annie made no reply. She was absolutely dominated by Monsieur de Nozay's will-power. She went to tell her mother-in-law and to put on her hat. Poor Annie! She was too simple-minded for all the extraordinary things that were happening to her. The idea of an affecting scene alarmed her and was even repugnant to her. Christiane was probably going to ask her forgiveness and it would be terrible.

"Oh, these French people," she said to herself, almost angrily, "they must always have something romantic or theatrical!"

She slackened her steps, like a child, in order to delay the interview. In spite of herself, her heart sank when she entered the silent, desolate house which always used to be so gay and so full of life. The void one creates in the world is, of course, in proportion to the place one fills. There are people whose voices have no echo and whose footsteps leave no trace.

Christiane wielded her influence far and near. In her own home, her individuality could be felt everywhere, in the arrangement of things, in the very perfume that was in the air. Her presence could always be felt from the drawing-room to the hall-door. Now that she was no longer there, there was an immense void.

Monsieur de Nozay went into Christiane's room first. A few minutes later, he took Annie in, and came out himself. In the spacious bedroom, there were plants, oxygenated air, plenty of light, and nothing to remind one of illness. And yet, an indefinable something revealed the presence of the dread visitor. The Duchess was lying in her huge bed, the lace of the pillow-slips

forming a halo round her head. The satin counterpane was beautifully embroidered and just near her lay a bunch of primroses, a branch of hawthorn and other spring flowers, which she had wanted to see for the last time.

Dr. Moreau, who could no longer refuse her anything, had, at her request, galvanised her by means of a strong injection of morphine.

The two women looked at each other for a few seconds without speaking. The Duchess, still capable of commanding a situation, said, in a voice that had lost its ring:

"You see, Annie, I am just about to leave this world. . . . My call has come and I did not want to go without telling you that I am very sorry to have caused you grief. I can do still more than that. I can give you back a little of your happiness . . ."

Here there was a pause. The Duchess's breath was getting shorter.

"In my fit of madness, I slandered Jacques. It was not just for your money that he married you, for he loved you. All that he said to you was true—all—do you understand? How and why we were thrown into each other's arms, I do not know— I shall know soon, perhaps-- I went to St. Germain without his knowledge— And let me tell you that when he came to himself again—it was your name that he uttered—not mine. It was you that he called—because you are his wife—the other half of himself— It is the wife always who has the better part. Believe me, in this world, where everything passes away, where everything is fleeting, the only true thing is conjugal love, the family— All the rest is flame and smoke and more especially smoke——"

The broken, indistinct words were infinitely sweet to the young wife. Her heart dilated with joy and with pity. After a moment's silence, Madame de Blanzac continued:

"You can forgive now. You must promise me to make peace with your husband. I need this promise, if I am to die tranquilly."

Annie could bear no more. The tears welled up into her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"Oh, get well, get well!" she implored, with a sincere ring in her voice.

"God forbid. I have already gone a long way and I would not turn back again now— The most difficult part is over— You promise me——"

Annie nodded, not daring to trust her voice.

"Thank you. I shall send a few lines to Jacques. And now, everything will be right. I want you to be happy together and to have a beautiful little family——"

These words, which summed up all the pain of the sacrifice, brought a fleeting blush to the dying woman's cheeks.

"And now we are friends,—are we not—?" she said, trying to smile.

The hands of the two women met in a firm clasp.

"I am quite happy now," said Christiane, closing her eyes.

Annie dared not move. She gazed admiringly at the beautiful face, crowned by its heavy masses of hair. The boldly-marked profile was more lovely than ever, for it already had the supreme beauty of death. When the doctor came into the room, she stooped and kissed Christiane, with an almost religious feeling.

"Good-bye," she said, "I will come back during the evening."

Madame de Blanzac opened her eyes.

"Good-bye," she answered. "Yes, come back soon." She spoke very quietly, as though in a dream.

On returning home, Annie simply told her mother-in-law that she and the Duchess were reconciled. She advised her to go at once and say farewell. Madame d'Anguilhon was only too glad to go, for nothing had been able to change the motherly feeling she had always had for Christiane.

The scene that Annie had so much dreaded had lifted her to a height that she had never yet attained in her life. The joy of forgiveness, which she had just experienced, made her feel as though she would like to go back to the Duchess and tend her, and do all she could for her. She reproached herself for having been cold and stupid. She could not help admiring this woman who was dying so bravely. How dignified she had been! She had not asked forgiveness and she had not humiliated herself. She had simply set matters straight and left the rest to Annie's sense of justice. Yes, it was very fine and Christiane was a true *grande dame*. It was not at all surprising that Jacques should have loved her. If she had been a man, Christiane was just the woman she would have loved. What a poor, little girl she felt beside her!

Directly after dinner, Annie told her mother-in-law that she was going back to Madame de Blanzac's and that she might possibly stay there all night. She coloured slightly as she said this. She took a bunch of violets with her, which she had gathered herself. On arriving next door, she went quickly past the gatekeeper's lodge and, not seeing any one in

the hall, straight upstairs. On reaching the small drawing-room, she stood still for a second, not daring to move. The folding-doors, leading into the bedroom, were thrown wide open and, at the far end of that room, she saw a kind of altar, with a crucifix. A priest was there in his surplice and, by the light of the wax tapers, Annie saw Christiane lying quite still, her hands clasped, and the paleness of death on her face. At the foot of her bed was the Count de Creil, whose grief was painful to witness. Louis de Challans was there, and also the Keradieus and Guy de Nozay. A little further away was a group of servants in an attitude of mingled reverence and sorrow.

Scarcely daring to breathe, Annie glided into the room and knelt down quietly by the Keradieus. With intense curiosity, she then watched the ceremony of extreme unction. To her, it seemed useless and even cruel. She did not know that, according to the Catholic faith, the unctions on the ears, hands, and feet of the dying woman effaced all guilty kisses—Jacques' kisses—and all the forbidden delights and caresses which had offended her.

As soon as the ceremony was over, she went nearer to Christiane, and heard her murmur: "Symbols, only symbols, but how beautiful and how consoling!"

On seeing Annie, a glad look came over her face. She took the bunch of violets eagerly, held it to her lips, and then clasped the flowers tightly in her hand, as though she did not want them to be taken from her again.

"It was a nice thought of yours," she said, in a far-off voice.

"Do you suffer much?" asked Annie.

"No, on the contrary. I feel wonderfully free from

suffering. Is it the effect of the morphine, I wonder, or is it the end?"

As she said this, she closed her eyes and fell into one of those sudden lethargies which sometimes precede the long sleep.

Dr. Moreau told Annie that the Duchess would probably be perfectly conscious until the very end, and he added that the end could not be far off. She decided to stay there all night. Guy de Nozay was as grateful to her as though Christiane had been a relative of his. Monsieur de Keradieu clasped her hand more warmly than he had ever done before, and looked at her several times with tears in his eyes.

The painful, solemn night passed by and, at dawn, Annie went back home, shuddering. The awe of death, the death she had just witnessed, was still in her eyes.

Jacques had had a very restless night and the Sister of Charity, who was nursing him, had been obliged to rouse Madame d'Anguilhon. She had not gone to bed again and was now awaiting her daughter-in-law anxiously.

As soon as she heard her enter the house, she went forward to meet her.

"Well?" she asked, in a tone that betrayed her emotion.

"She has just passed away— She looked so happy."

"She is happy, my child, do not doubt that."

Annie's heart was full to bursting. She threw her arms round her mother-in-law's neck, kissed her, and then went away to her own room to give vent to her tears.

CHAPTER XXXI

As the Marquis d'Anguilhon was not yet able to get up, it had been possible to keep from him the news of the illness and death of the Duchess de Blanzac. Nothing had transpired and not a word had been uttered calculated to arouse his suspicions, and yet, by a psychical phenomenon of more frequent occurrence than we imagine, he had been affected by what was taking place in the next house. A nameless anxiety took possession of him. Christiane haunted his dreams. He saw her in danger continually, and was not able to go to her rescue. He would wake up with his face damp with perspiration and his limbs aching, as though he had been trampled on. The impression of this nightmare would often last all day. The night of the Duchess's death, he had been assailed by a mysterious fear and had asked to have all the candles in the room lighted. He felt intuitively that something was being concealed from him and he tried to read the faces of all who approached him. He fancied that the Count de Chastel had died, although he was assured to the contrary. He noticed the change in Annie at once. After three weeks of inexplicable and almost cruel coldness, she had come to his bedside one day, with her old affectionate look in her eyes. It was as though she wanted to obtain his forgiveness. He wondered what was the reason of this

change. All this made him feverish and delayed his recovery. Finally, he was able to leave his bed and to lie on the sofa. At this stage, the doctor said that he could bear a shock without any danger.

Guy de Nozay wanted to give Jacques the letter that the Duchess had left for him. The poor fellow was heart-broken at the loss of the woman who had won the deepest affection of his life. One morning, on entering his friend's room, he had taken no pains to disguise his true feelings. The Marquis saw that something was wrong and did not give him time to speak.

"Bad news?" he asked. "Is Chastel dead?"

"No, he is quite out of danger, fortunately. That would have been the finishing touch——"

"What is it then? What is happening? There is something, I know. I can feel it. Is it Madame de Blanzac?"

As he uttered this name, light seemed suddenly to dawn on him and he turned deadly pale.

"Christiane?" he asked.

"Christiane, yes, you have guessed rightly."

"She has killed herself?" exclaimed the Marquis, letting his secret dread escape his lips.

"No, no, thank God, it is not that. She took a chill on leaving the Opéra. Congestion of the lungs set in—Dr. Moreau did all he could to save her—but he could not—and after a week's illness—she succumbed . . ."

Guy had spoken slowly and hesitated between his sentences, so that the terrible news should not be too sudden for his friend.

"Dead?—she, dead?" exclaimed Jacques, his eyes dilating with horror and his body trembling con-

vulsively. "Dead," he began again, "oh, it is not possible!"

He wiped the great drops of perspiration away from his forehead as he spoke.

"Alas, it is only too true."

There was a long silence between the two men.

"You knew that she was dying and you did not tell me?" said the Marquis, at last.

"What good would it have done, my poor friend, as you could not go to her?"

"I should have gone. I would have found the necessary strength."

Then drawing himself up, he asked, in a lower voice:

"You have something for me, have you not?"

Guy held out Christiane's letter, which was fastened with a large, red seal. Jacques took it with trembling fingers and clasped it tightly in his hand, as though he wanted to feel it and make it enter into his very flesh.

"I thought she would not have gone without leaving a line for me,—that would have been too cruel."

Guy rose to go away, but Jacques asked him to stay.

"Tell me everything now," he said. "Let me know all that happened after that unfortunate duel."

Guy saw that it would be better to finish with the details at once. He told him how the Duchess had taken the chill. He described her illness and her peaceful end.

"Oh, she was so happy to die," he said, "that if I had had the power to bring her back to life, I should not have dared."

Guy then spoke of the numerous tokens of affection

and respect that she had received. He told Jacques about her will and about the intense grief of Louis de Challans and of the Count de Creil. All these things, painful and consoling at the same time, moved Jacques to the very depth of his soul. His face flushed and turned pale as he listened, and there was an expression in his eyes that was pitiful to see.

"I must tell you too," said Guy, "that your wife behaved admirably. The Duchess asked her to go and see her. She not only went, but she spent the last night with her. Her presence at the funeral, and her evident grief, served to contradict the suspicions which her quarrel with Madame de Blanzac had roused. She did all this in the most natural way possible, and with a simplicity that charmed me. She may not be able to turn fine phrases, but she certainly knows how to act, and very nobly, too, I must say. If only on her account, you ought to pull yourself together and conquer your grief."

"I will do my best," said the Marquis. "What a void in that house and at Blanzac!" he added, with a shudder.

"It is terrible," agreed Guy. "Ah, what a place she filled, our poor, great Christiane. Do you know that I have lost more than you have?"

"More than I have?"

"Yes, it is possible to find another woman, a dozen more women, but not another friend such as she was. I feel utterly forsaken. There are bad moments in life and both you and I are having one of those bad moments now. Well, I must go," said Guy, getting up as he spoke. "Good-bye."

The two men grasped hands without uttering a word.

"Give orders that I am not to be disturbed, under any pretext, until I ring," said the Marquis, just as Guy reached the door.

"You are not going to do anything foolish, I hope?" said Guy, turning and looking at his friend.

"No, you can be easy on that score."

When once he was alone, the Marquis kissed Christiane's letter, opened it slowly, and began to read it. The letters seemed to enter his brain without making any sense, but finally he began to understand. The tenderness and consolation which emanated from these few lines of farewell went straight to his very soul and soothed it, bringing tears to his eyes, tears which gave him relief.

"Jacques," wrote the Duchess, "God has called me and I cannot leave this world without saying farewell to you. Things are all ending in the right way and I am glad of it. I have always believed in God's justice and now I believe in His mercy. It will be a great grief to you to find me gone. I know this, for I feel it. Remember, though, that I am at rest. Time will then do its work and 'the dead are soon gone.' Do some good in the world, in memory of me. I should like my memory to be of some use in the world. As far as it is in my power, I am repairing the harm I did you. I am sorry to have disturbed Annie's happiness. I cannot regret my love for you and I have no remorse. I have left you the *Addolorata.* It was most certainly I myself. Put her in the darkest corner of your study, so that no one shall see the real face. How painful it was, the wearing of that mask!

"Instead of a kiss, I send you a blessing. I have

a right to do this as a dying woman. May God give you sons—sons as handsome and strong as you could wish. You see, Jacques, that I am at last above all jealousy, above all petty feelings. I had to mount very high, in order to get above all this. I had to reach the very gate of death. I am there now and I no longer hear all the noise of this world. I shall very soon see no one else but you, as yours will be the last face left in my mind.

"Adieu—I dare not say *au revoir*,

"CHRISTIANE."

The Duchess had written these lines on the second day of her illness. The evening before her death she added the following postscript:

"Annie has just left me. All is right between us —perfect peace. The worst things are more terrible from afar than when we are near to them."

Jacques' head fell back on his cushions and he remained a long time motionless, with his eyes closed. This then was the cause of the anguish he had felt. She was dying just a few steps away from him. All the impressions he had had during their last interview came back to his mind. Christiane in the carriage by him, with the sweet warmth of life in her body. He remembered her subtle perfume and the soft material in which she was clad. He saw the half-open cloak, the sparkle of her diamonds, and her proud head above her big fur collar. How her eyes had gleamed in the dark carriage and how large the pupils had looked! And now he should never see her again, never. She would always be absent. She had been

stolen from him during his illness; yes, she had been literally stolen from him. Ah, then he had not been dreaming. She had actually come to St. Germain and it was she whom he had seen bending over him. For a long time, he remained plunged in his painful meditation. He read the Duchess's letter once again and then, getting up with difficulty, he dragged himself across to his desk, and locked it up in one of the drawers.

And now, he must see Annie. It would be horribly painful, but he must see her. She had forgiven Christiane, but would she forgive him? He was grateful to her for what she had done. What a good creature she really was! With this thought in his mind, Jacques rang the bell, and sent to ask his wife if she would come to him.

Annie knew the reason of Guy's visit and had been waiting, in fear and trembling, for her husband's summons. She wanted this interview and yet she dreaded it. She felt that she had acted very well and, like a child, she wanted to be told so. On the other hand, the situation would be embarrassing. She knew that she would be speechless and that she would never be able to find the words for saying what she wanted to say.

She was very nervous and very much excited when she entered her husband's room. On seeing his deadly paleness and his drawn features, she had a pang at her heart.

Jacques pointed to a seat near his sofa and she sat down.

"You know what I have just heard," he said, in a changed voice. "It is a great trouble to me. I cannot help that. After the way you have behaved in

this, it would be an insult to you for me to dissemble. Do not be offended by my grief."

"Offended? Why, no, that would be absurd. You would be an extraordinary sort of man if the death of a person, for whose sake you had forgotten so much, could be indifferent to you. If Madame de Blanzac had lived, I should have found a way to give you back your liberty. I should have gone back to America."

Jacques laid his hand on Annie's.

"And how can you tell whether I should have allowed you to go?" he said, with emotion. "You are the Marchioness d'Anguilhon, the other half of myself, the mother of my son. Those are ties which could not be lightly broken. I should never have been happy, separated from you."

An expression of pleasure lighted up Annie's face.

"Jacques," she began and then stopped abruptly, blushing and evidently very much confused. "I promised Christiane to make it all up with you, to forget the past. I am ready to do this——"

"Merely because you promised?"

"Because I love you," replied the young Marchioness, simply.

Jacques was more touched by this answer than he cared to show. He raised the hand he was holding to his lips and kissed it.

"Those are good words to hear, Annie," he said.

"Madame de Blanzac assured me that I had the better part. She must have known—and I am beginning to believe she was right. She told me, too, that she had slandered you, that you did not marry me only for my money, and that—you really loved me. She took a big thorn out of my heart when she said that.

The idea that you had been lying and acting a part was more painful to me than all the rest."

"And you will have confidence again?"

"Yes. You see, I have been thinking about things a great deal lately. It is quite true, perhaps, that you could not help—what happened. A great passion must be a kind of malady, like typhus fever and small-pox. It never comes a second time in one's life, I hope. Does it?"

"No, thank Heaven, no."

"Well, you must have been thoroughly vaccinated then, so that I shall be quite tranquil in my mind."

She said this so seriously that a smile came to Jacques' lips.

"You may be quite tranquil, I assure you. Then, too, when a thing of this kind does not separate a husband and wife forever, it brings them nearer to each other. I feel that you are nearer to me than you have ever been."

"All the same," said Annie, after a moment's reflection, "I fancy that only a Frenchwoman could ever really understand a Frenchman."

Just as she said this, Madame d'Anguilhon came into the room. On seeing the husband and wife hand in hand, she was going out again, but her son begged her to stay.

"Come here, mother," he said. "We have something to tell you which will make you happy. You must have noticed that we were no longer on the same terms as formerly," he began, in an embarrassed tone.

"Yes, and it grieved me very much to see this."

"Well, we are friends again. I had broken certain promises and caused Annie much sorrow, but she has forgiven——"

"Like all the Marchionesses d'Anguilhon," said the Dowager Marchioness, laying her hand on her daughter-in-law's shoulder. "It is all the more noble of you, my child, as you have been brought up with different ideas and you have made such sacrifices for your husband's sake."

"Oh, I do not regret them, I have never regretted them," replied Annie, eagerly.

"You must go and spend a few months in America," said Madame d'Anguilhon. "You might travel with the Keradieus, as they are not going until the end of June. Jacques will have time to get quite well."

Annie looked at her husband anxiously.

"Yes, we will certainly go to America," he said. "It was my intention to propose the same thing."

Annie's face beamed with joy. She would have liked to kiss Jacques' hand, but she did not dare. She pressed it against her cheek, with a delightful feeling of possession.

"I am so happy," she said, gently.

CHAPTER XXXII

Madame d'Anguilhon was too much a woman not to know that the neighbourhood of Christiane's house was very bad for her son just then. She asked the doctor to order him away to Blonay at once, and Jacques did not raise any objection.

His convalescence had been interrupted by the shock he had had, so that for some weeks neither the open air nor the forces of the spring season took any effect on him.

Jacques had seen Madame de Blanzac for the last time in excellent health. Her death seemed to him, at times, impossible, and at other times, mysterious. He did not believe in the alleged congestion of the lungs. The more he reread her farewell letter, the more convinced he was that she had tried to die, and that something was being concealed from him. He could see her distinctly, as she was after that terrible scene. He saw her walk away through the long suite of reception rooms, gradually look smaller, and then disappear altogether. This impression, standing out so curiously in his brain, gave him a sensation of utter desolation. He did not know that his love had then received its death-blow and that he would never have found the same happiness again with Christiane. He did not know how merciful God had been in calling her back to Him. He could not possibly know

all this and he deplored her loss passionately. His grief and the morbid thoughts it engendered had the most baneful effect on him, physically and mentally. He always felt extremely weary, he slept badly, and the paleness of anæmia could be seen on his face. He took no interest in anything, not even in Blonay and its life. Out of delicacy, he made a great effort to hide his sadness when Annie and his mother were present. He had never appreciated his wife's character as much as during this trying time. She did not ask him any embarrassing questions, nor did she torment him with little attentions and he was deeply grateful to her for her tact.

The joy of being reconciled with her husband, and the thought of seeing her family again, drove all painful memories away from Annie's mind. Jacques' changed looks did not alarm or distress her very much. She was quite sure that the sea voyage to America would quite cure him. One thing alone made her anxious, and that was that he never spoke of their departure. She was afraid lest he should find some pretext, at the last moment, for staying behind at Blonay, and sending her with the Keradieus. She was always throwing out feelers, after the manner of women.

"We will do this or that," she would say, "when we are in New York."

"Yes," he would reply, invariably, "anything you like."

The way in which he said this was not very encouraging. Annie could not understand that the idea of visiting a new country, and such a country as America, should be a matter of such indifference to him.

No, Jacques cared little, just now, about the bay

of New York, Brooklyn Bridge, or any of the great sights of the New World. All he wanted was to go and kneel at Christiane's grave and to feel that he was near her for a few moments. He thought of this, day and night, and he could not start before he had been there. He did not like to tell his wife of his intention to go to Blanzac and he knew that she would feel hurt if he went without telling her.

The young Marchioness had been wise enough not to banish Christiane's name from their conversation. She often spoke of her with her old admiration, as of a dear friend. The first time she had mentioned her, Jacques had looked at her in astonishment and had felt wounded, for it had seemed to him like a profanation. Was she already so far away that Annie should dare to speak of her like that? Simple natures are always somewhat disconcerting to complex ones.

One evening, when Jacques was pretending to read, in order to avoid having to talk, Annie suddenly said:

"Jacques, shall you not go to Blanzac before we leave? We only have ten days now, remember."

Her husband started and let his book fall from his hand.

"To Blanzac?" he repeated, his face turning red. "Yes, I had thought of going—you do not mind?"

"No, what I should mind would be if, out of consideration for me, you refrained from going, and when we were once in America you should begin to regret it. You would be quite capable of shortening our stay, or of leaving me in the lurch out there, while you came back to go to Blanzac. I am beginning to know you," she added, with a smile.

Jacques rose from his seat and paced up and down the room for a few minutes, trying to master his emotion.

"Well," he said, at last, "I think I will go to-morrow. I will stay the night in Paris and get back here the day after."

Then, like a child who, after obtaining some coveted permission, feels inclined to do everything he is asked and more besides he added:

"When I get back, I will finish all my arrangements. I have been dreadfully lazy, lately. How are you getting on with your preparations?"

"Oh, I am nearly ready. Neither Catherine nor I needed any urging on, I can assure you. I warn you that we shall have an awful amount of luggage."

Ah, how little he cared now how much luggage they had! She might take hundreds of trunks for all he cared.

"Annie, I have been very selfish and cruel to keep you so long a time from your family," said Jacques, remorsefully.

"Oh, it does not matter, now," she answered, promptly. "I shall have all the more pleasure in seeing every one again. There are more changes in America in six years than in Europe in twenty, so that it will be like going to a new country."

"Well, you may pride yourself on being good-natured."

"Every cloud has a silver lining and I only look on the bright side. It is the only way to be happy in this world and to have a good time."

"At any rate, it is the way to make others happy," said the Marquis.

Only a Frenchwoman of very elevated character or

a very shrewd woman could have acted in the way Annie did, and even then it would have required the most heroic effort. The young American woman little thought how dangerous the freshly-made grave of a rival might prove. She had no idea of the communion that may exist between the living and the dead. She would simply have thought it ridiculous and petty to be jealous now of Christiane. She was quite convinced that she had the better part and that was quite enough for her. She thought that Jacques might like to see the Duchess's grave. Her comprehension did not go beyond the actual "seeing the grave." She had suggested it by way of putting him at his ease, and also in order that he might not be tempted to go there without telling her. Oh, yes, she thought she was beginning to know him thoroughly now.

On hearing what Annie had suggested, Madame d'Anguilhon could not help exclaiming: "Oh, what a dear child she is, and what greatness there is in her simplicity!"

The following day, the Marquis started for Paris, as he had proposed. There was no sign of languor about him. It was as though he had taken some powerful elixir.

He put up at the Hôtel de Castiglione and spent the evening in his rooms, in order not to risk meeting any acquaintances. The following day, he went first to La Rosette. He knew how painful this pilgrimage would be, but he felt that he ought to make it. Then, too, he knew he would find something of Christiane there, the last traces of her here below.

The sight of Toni in deep mourning, and of her thin face, with its severe and even hard expression, gave him a pang at his heart. The old nurse had been with

Christiane, day and night, up to the last moment. She may have guessed that the Marquis was, in some way, responsible for her death. It may have been that, on seeing him, she was too deeply moved to speak. At any rate, she did not utter a word, but merely opened the silent, empty villa for him.

As soon as he entered, Jacques staggered and was obliged to lean against the wall. The air was still impregnated with Christiane's subtle perfume. This gave him the impression that she was there. He thought that he felt her presence and this sensation was both horrible and sweet. Memories of their love and happiness awoke within him in this desolate dwelling, causing him the most exquisite suffering. Ah, the cage was really empty. All the doors were wide open. There was no light and there were no plants. There was nothing living. The very furniture had been pushed against the wall and had the rigidness of things which are no longer in contact with human beings. Jacques was chilled to the heart. He entered her bedroom and, closing the door after him, he went and knelt down by the side of the bed. He buried his face in this couch, which was now as cold and hard as a coffin, and he expiated their love and their forbidden communion, her sin and all his sins. Under the influence of this impression of silence and death, a religious sentiment awoke in his heart and purified it, as a living flame might have done. When he rose from his knees, his face wore the devout, serene expression which prayer gives to it. On looking round, he saw a little sprig of boxwood above the holy-water vessel. It was the boxwood that had remained from last Palm Sunday. He took it down and put it away in his pocketbook. A few minutes later, Monsieur

d'Anguilhon went away, taking with him a beautiful bunch of roses for the Duchess's grave. He looked round again as he left, bidding farewell to this dwelling, where their lives had been united for some time. He could not help feeling joy at the thought that it was to be pulled down and that it would never be profaned by another love.

The Marquis arrived at Orleans at three o'clock. Blanzac was half an hour's drive from there. He went straight to the old chapel, leaving the carriage in the road. By taking a cross-road, he soon reached a heap of freshly cut flowers, which marked the spot where Christiane lay.

The grave of a person who has belonged to us, and whom we have loved, affects us differently from that of a relative. Something mysterious seems to emanate from it. Just at first, more particularly, we feel distinctly that the bond is not entirely broken and that love is really stronger than death. Jacques' knees had scarcely touched the earth which covered the Duchess, when he felt a strange happiness. No she had not quite gone. The idea of her disappearance, which had caused him such anguish, left him completely. It seemed to him that he had found her again and a little joy mingled with his sorrow. He spoke a few tender words to her. He promised her that he would do some good in the world, as she had asked him, and that he would never, never forget her. He stayed there a long time, for he could not make up his mind to leave her. Twice he started away and then came back again, as though she were keeping him there. Before leaving, he looked all round. It was just the kind of sepulchre for which she had always wished. The trees that grew on the hill stopped

about fifty yards away and encircled her grave and the old chapel, like a sacred place. When he thought of her last wish, he was deeply moved. She had wished to sleep the last long sleep alone. He guessed why—she was faithful even beyond death.

. . . . . .

The visit to Christiane's grave drove away all Jacques' morbid ideas, leaving in his soul one of those salutary griefs which temper a man's character.

On returning home, he began to take an active interest in his affairs. By way of pleasing Annie, he declared that he was delighted now to be going to America. He promised to be quite pleasant to every one, even to her two aunts.

On the twenty-third of June, Jacques and Annie started from Blonay, leaving Madame d'Anguilhon there with little Philippe. They met the Keradieus at Havre, and also Guy de Nozay, and several other friends who were there to see them off. Annie had invited Guy to accompany them. He declined, but had promised to go with them on their next journey. Actuated by a chivalrous sentiment, that was very characteristic of him, he had not cared to desert Christiane. Every one was going away, so that he would stay.

When the *Touraine* actually started, Catherine's face beamed with delight.

"At last, Miss Annie," she exclaimed joyfully, "we are on the way."

"I really begin to believe we are going," said Annie, smiling.

"It is six years since you left New York, is it not?" asked Madame de Keradieu.

"Yes, six years. If any one had told me then, that I should be six years without going back to America, I should have been in despair. And the six years have passed like a dream!"